

SURVIVING THE SMALL CHURCH:  
A SURVEY OF CHINESE IMMIGRANT CHURCHES AND PASTORS IN  
NEW ENGLAND

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To Yamin,

My trustworthy co-labor, wonderful companion, and loving wife

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis-project investigates a pastoral theology of small membership Chinese churches in New England. Because of the economic situation in Connecticut, Chinese immigrants and Christians are leaving rapidly in a significant number due to job relocation in recent years. The situation has had a great impact on the Chinese churches, particularly with regard to their survival. The purpose of this study, therefore, is to seek a theological understanding of small Chinese churches under current challenges, and to obtain responses from small Chinese church pastors regarding their ministerial theology and their efforts to maintain the churches' vitality.

# CHAPTER 1

## THE PROBLEM AND ITS SETTING

### Introduction

“Is there a place for small membership Chinese churches in New England?”<sup>1</sup>

This thesis work aims to survey a series of questions about how small Chinese churches survive a harsh environment in New England. To understand the problem in small Chinese churches, the author would like to introduce the following facts and challenges they have encountered, and the necessity of this research.

### Chinese People Are Moving Out Due to Economic Issues

A recent statistic shows that Connecticut is one of the top states people are moving out of.<sup>2</sup> The slow economy of the state could be to blame, causing people to leave for job relocation.<sup>3</sup> Such influence also impacts Chinese people—they are moving out, too.<sup>4</sup> As immigrant churches, Chinese churches in New England areas need to rethink

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1. A question quoted from the spouse of the author while they were discussing possible thesis topics. In a great sense the purpose of this research is to answer such an inquiry. Also, the term “New England” here refers to a conceptual sense rather than its geographical definition. This study mainly concerns church issues in the State of Connecticut.

2. Lidia Ryan, “Moving Study: Connecticut is a top state to leave,” *ctpost*, January 2, 2018, accessed November 15, 2018, <https://www.ctpost.com/news/article/Moving-study-Connecticut-is-a-top-state-to-leave-12467169.php>.

3. Stephen Singer, “US: Connecticut Economic Growth Slowest In New England,” *Hartford Courant*, November 22, 2017, accessed November 15, 2018, <http://www.courant.com/business/hc-biz-connecticut-economy-20171121-story.html>.

4. Occupying one percent of the population of Connecticut, Chinese residency dropped from 35,907 (in 2015) to 35,250 (in 2016). Information was obtained via search at [factfinder.census.gov](http://factfinder.census.gov).

church ministry when facing challenges from the outside, especially for churches with smaller membership.

This current demographic change has greatly affected small Chinese churches in Connecticut. Core families with higher education backgrounds suffer the most from the weak economy. This issue touches the heart of the problem in small Chinese church ministries. Because many core volunteers in the churches are employed by high-tech industries such as pharmaceuticals, or highly professional businesses such as insurance firms, their relocation due to constant layoffs force churches to confront many obstacles. It is the financial issue that immediately makes the most impact on the ministry. With the main contributors leaving, the displacement directly hits church finances, specifically for smaller churches. Further, because the main contributors are often the core volunteers in the church, their departure has a double impact.

Small churches now have more need of finances and manpower. Finances might be relieved by temporary budget cuts or other ways to stabilize, but the loss of manpower may be devastating to a small church. In this study all participants from small churches share the same concern of a lacking workforce, especially the core volunteers who work for pharmaceuticals, such as Bristol Myers-Squibb Inc. (Wallingford, CT)—a company that has been conducting massive layoffs since 2015; Alexion Pharmaceuticals (New Haven, CT) laid off 20% of its workforce in 2017; Pfizer, Inc. plans to cut 300 jobs in 2018 from three company sites, including one in Gorton, CT.<sup>5</sup> Company layoffs go back

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5. Luther Turmelle, “Bristol Myers-Squibb closing Wallingford facility, leaving Connecticut,” *New Haven Register*, December 13, 2016, accessed November 15, 2018, <http://www.nhregister.com/business/article/Bristol-Myers-Squibb-closing-Wallingford-11322727.php>; Manas Mishra, “Alexion Pharma to lay off 20 percent of workforce,” *Reuters*, September 12, 2017, accessed November 15, 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-alexion-layoffs/alexion-pharma-to-lay-off-20-percent-of-workforce-idUSKCN1BN1IX>; Ed Silverman, “Pfizer closing its neuroscience division and cutting 300 jobs,” *Stat*,

to 2007 with 10,000 jobs cut that year.<sup>6</sup> A Hartford-based giant insurance company, Aetna Inc., moved its headquarters to New York City.<sup>7</sup> Since the state economy has been going downhill in general, small church volunteers who moved out, especially the core members, or people in leadership positions, may create vacancies, discontinuities, and gaps in the ministries. The loss of devoted families and contributors, qualified volunteers, and lay leaders in small churches may hardly recover in a short time.

### The Challenges to Survival for a Small Chinese Immigrant Church

#### *Not an Ordinary Small Church*

Since many authors have done good surveys of smaller churches, why is this research important? Because there are nuances to small immigrant churches. This author found that there is limited knowledge of small Chinese immigrant churches in the New England area. One may wonder how different mainstream and immigrant small churches can be. Given the circumstances of immigrants in the U. S., some cultural and social factors of immigrant church ministry need to be addressed. For example, in comparison to mainline small churches, immigrants are much less rooted for the sake of family. They have fewer family ties than American natives. Simply put, it is not because the parents used to attend the church so that the children will come to the same church when they have grown up. In fact, most Chinese believers, for example, are first-generation

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January 6, 2018, accessed November 15, 2018, <https://www.statnews.com/pharmalot/2018/01/06/pfizer-neuroscience-alzheimer-layoffs/>.

6. “Top 5 layoffs of 2007,” FierceBiotech, accessed November 15, 2018, <https://www.fiercebiotech.com/special-report/top-5-layoffs-of-2007>.

7. Sarah Maslin Nir, “Insurance Giant Aetna Is Leaving Hartford for New York City,” *The New York Times*, June 29, 2017, accessed November 15, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/06/29/nyregion/insurance-giant-aetna-is-leaving-hartford-for-new-york.html>.

Christians. Parents or family association are not the reason they attend church. This distinguishes many small immigrant churches from their American counterparts. Small churches vary given different peoples and contexts.

Unlike mainstream small churches, immigrant churches face more challenges because resources are relatively limited. Without strong family or community connections, immigrants are more prone to move from place to place due to socio-economic or other issues. In short, one apparent feature of the Chinese immigrant church, especially with attendees of higher education, is the high turnover of the membership.<sup>8</sup> Chinese immigrants may feel more anxiety about uncertainty in the future in this regard. As mentioned, they come to a small town and church not because of their family connections, but because of jobs. Job changes cause them to move around. In this sense, immigrant communities, especially the Chinese immigrant community, is job-centered—where there exists a more promising job opportunity, this is where the Chinese community flourishes.

### *Ministerial and Theological Challenges*

In such a climate, it is easy to understand pastors will need to put in extra effort to cultivate a God-centered lifestyle among Chinese congregations. If life is centered on maintaining jobs and families, church life can be marginalized. Immigrants fight to survive, small churches have to fight even harder. While minorities are easily

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8. Unfortunately, the author cannot find researchable data showing the percentage of highly educated membership in the Chinese church. It is from a common impression that the churches, except in China town in this country, have a large population of Christians with a masters or higher degree of academic achievement. Because of immigrant policy, many members of small town Chinese churches may work in high tech companies or in colleges, or take on professional vocations in law or medicine, after graduating from U.S. higher education institutions.

marginalized in society, church life is easily ignored when life becomes harsh for the immigrant community. With limited resources, small churches and pastors require more endeavors to maintain a vibrant Christ-centered worldview.

The competition between fighting for a fair livelihood and keeping a steady church life is sometimes intense for Chinese Christians. On the one hand, people look for prosperity for themselves and the family. On the other, they are Christians struggling to live according to faith in an even more secularized society. In a sense, Chinese churches are even more marginalized in the immigrant community, especially when the church cannot provide enough direct help with jobs, visa applications, or other “basic things” American natives may take for granted. People are too busy trying to maintain an acceptable livelihood. They have limited energy, time, and money for their Christian faith and church. In view of Mainland Chinese immigrants with strong atheist backgrounds, Chinese, even Christians, are really convinced of self-made success. The philosophy of such Chinese Christians is how to be a successful person and fulfill the American dream with God’s assistance. Instead of a God-centered theology, Chinese believers such as these want to know how God can help them to prosper in a material way rather than God’s purpose for Christians in leading a spiritual life. Such Christians in fact practice a self-centered lifestyle, ignoring a biblical church life.

This mixture of a self-centered worldview and materialism strikes the small Chinese church from the inside, especially in a context of economic crisis and future uncertainty. Small church pastors are desperately needed to be equipped with efficient leadership and a redemptive pastoral theology, centered on Christ and his cross, to continue church ministry in New England. Pastors seek maturity in pastoral theology for

their small church. While the people of God have been tempted to drift away in the storm of socio-economic change, Chinese pastors will give it all to anchor the church to the faith of Christ, and search for possible ways to renew church life.

### *Cultural Impacts*

In some ways, the culture or customs of the motherland still drives life for Chinese immigrants in America. The Internet, Chinese news, TV drama, and social media deliver not only nostalgia but a powerful cultural impact. For example, the recent emergence of a social media platform called WeChat, invented by a Chinese company, brings up challenges to Chinese churches in the United States.<sup>9</sup> Before WeChat, the Chinese church was often the community center. People were used to coming to church at least for a social purpose, such as getting to know new friends, or attending the Chinese New Year Celebration in the church. Nevertheless, when social media became a popular communication tool and cultural phenomenon in the Chinese community, friends and seekers began to detach from the church. In fact, the online media is gradually replacing the church community by providing a more convenient, instant, and private way to connect with fellow Chinese groups. Accordingly, the community focus is shifting from church activities to WeChat grouping. Just a few simple clicks and people create groups for jogging, camping, grocery shopping, job hunting, etc. WeChat provides tremendous amounts of information that a small church may not sufficiently compare with. People can simply avoid religious activity in the church, easily reaching out for new friendships and social activities. Substantially relying on the relationship with the

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9. WeChat, accessed November 15, 2018, <https://web.wechat.com>.

community for development, the church will struggle with attracting new people by traditional outreach methods if it is not aware of the dominant power of new social media. Therefore, in view of cultural influence, the church should rethink its strategy on evangelism in the community for the sake of development. When considering small church survival, cultural factors can be as crucial as economic issues outside the church.

### *The Relationship Issue*

In small churches, people issues come first. Relationship issues between leaders are one of the focal concerns. To survive, small churches depend on relationship, especially between core co-laborers or volunteers. Yet, when issues pop up between leaders, such as a different understanding of doctrines or practices, can the leadership properly deal with its inner conflicts so as to keep the fellowship and unity? When a particular theological bias starts to influence a small church, how can the pastor handle the tension between biblical truth and the “people first” church culture? Questions like this can be extremely tricky for the leadership, trying to maintain a sound doctrine and reasonable order without threatening harmony in a small church prioritized relationship. Relational conflicts happen even in small churches. Struggles between leaders especially will often escalate into a major crisis of church unity. This writer hopes to survey how pastors respond to relational conflicts among leaders.

### **The Research**

Here in the church ministries of small Chinese churches encountering a fast-changing world inside and outside the church and community, an up-to-date investigation

for churches and ministries is apparently important and necessary. This research project is a report from the pastors of small Chinese churches in Connecticut. The term “small church” in this regard is defined by a church with adult membership of about 200 people.<sup>10</sup> The purpose of the study is that the author wants to see how small church pastors respond in such an environment where the churches face challenges for survival. Pastoral participants will reflect on social issues such as population displacement and its impact on ministries, on pastoral issues such as leadership in this special season, or on the matters of enhancing church vitality and renewal so as to look for opportunities for survival and even breakthroughs in the current ministerial reality. Mostly, the author hopes to provide a real-world experience of how pastors and churches may deal with crises from all aspects of the ministry and maintain the spiritual health of church.

The research aims to answer a series of questions of survival for the small church with a feasible attempt, which is to invite Chinese pastors in Connecticut who will ponder together for the common good for small Chinese churches in New England. In this view, the author will reach out and recruit the volunteering pastors as participants in a researchable manner. The recruits include several Chinese pastors, including the author himself, for the purpose of conducting a series of semi-constructed interviews. The interviewees serve in the following Chinese churches in Connecticut: Chinese Baptist Church of Greater Hartford (CBCGH), Grace Baptist Church of Cheshire (GBC), Norwich Chinese Christian Church (NCCC), and New Haven Chinese Alliance Church (NHCAC).

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10. See Simon Yiu-chuen Lee, ed., *Zhong xiao xing tang hui: shen fen, zheng zha yu zeng zhang* [Small & Medium-sized Church: Identity, Struggle and Growth] (Hong Kong: The Chinese University of Hong Kong, 2012), 13.

## **A Generic History of the Four Chinese Churches in Connecticut**

The following is a brief introduction to the Chinese Baptist Church of Greater Hartford (CBCGH), Grace Baptist Church of Cheshire (GBC), Norwich Chinese Alliance Church (NCCC), and New Haven Chinese Alliance Church (NHCAC).<sup>11</sup>

CBCGH is one of the early established Chinese churches officially founded in 1977. Over the course of about 40 years the church has grown steadily and become one of the largest Chinese churches with a membership of more than 200 adults. The congregations include Mandarin, English, and Cantonese native speakers. Before taking office in the pastorate, the pastor served as a core leader in the church for more than 10 years.

GBC was founded in 1974. The decline of membership in recent years persuaded the leadership to merge with a local Chinese Bible Study group in 2011. The first Chinese pastor has been called to serve since 2012. The church membership, including both Chinese and English combined, is about 50 people; mostly Chinese. About one-third of the membership works for a local pharmaceutical firm.

NCCC just celebrated their 10th anniversary in 2016. The church is close to the two biggest casinos in the state, where many Chinese immigrants work in the restaurants or casino areas.<sup>12</sup> At least one-third of the core volunteers are employed by a local pharmaceutical company.

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11. Church websites: Chinese Baptist Church of Greater Hartford, <https://www.cbcgh.org/>; Grace Baptist Church, <http://www.gbcccheshire.com>; Norwich Chinese Christian Church, <http://home.ctnccc.org>; New Haven Chinese Alliance Church, <http://www.newhavencac.org/PRD/home.php>.

12. Mohegan Sun in Uncasville, CT, and Foxwoods Resort Casino in Mashantucket, CT.

NHCAC was found in 1996. The church is on the Yale University campus. The church is devoted to serving Chinese students and visiting scholars. Around ten core families, mainly working at Yale University and in local pharmaceutical firms, regularly support the church.

## CHAPTER 2

### THEOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

#### **Introduction**

Theologically speaking, to respond to the challenges of small Chinese churches, first of all, it is necessary to review the biblical accounts of the Early Church. The church of the New Testament and early centuries provides historical evidence of how a church begins and develops, especially when facing the challenge of survival. The history of church is still insightful for small churches today.

Secondly, among the early churches, it seems proper to learn about the church of Jerusalem. The church, which F. F. Bruce once called “the mother-church of the Christian world,”<sup>1</sup> is the first church taking on ministry in history. The lessons of the mother church can be valuable to all churches today. Particularly, the writer will summarize Bruce’s survey on the church’s downfall. The purpose is to rethink the small church and prevent it from the drawbacks the mother church experienced.

Thirdly, considering small church theology, one may explore the biblical theme of “The Remnant”. The historical Israel Remnant lays down the foundation for the small church because of their similarity. The author will argue that actually the small church is an extension of the Remnant in regard to common life experience, such as the Diaspora or migration. They also share in God’s promises for his chosen people now and then. Consequently, the small church may identify itself with the Remnant in this regard.

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1. F. F. Bruce, “The Church of Jerusalem,” *Christian Brethren Research Fellowship Journal* 4 (April 1964): 5, accessed November 15, 2018, [https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/cbrfj/church-jerusalem\\_bruce.pdf](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/cbrfj/church-jerusalem_bruce.pdf).

Finally, as immigrants, the theology of the small Chinese church will tackle church characteristics. Under such a guideline, the author will survey the church's culture and dynamics. The goal is to figure out what the Chinese church and pastor should concern themselves with in their struggle to survive and to develop.

## The Early Churches

### House Churches

The early churches were basically house churches. Many accounts prove this basic understanding of the character of the churches. Early Christians commonly gathered in houses: "Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts" (Acts 2:46); "But Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off both men and women and put them in prison" (Acts 8:3); "Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my co-workers in Christ Jesus. Greet also the church that meets at their house" (Romans 16:3-5); "Greet those who belong to the household of Aristobulus" (Romans 16:10); "Greet those in the household of Narcissus who are in the Lord" (Romans 16:11); "The churches in the province of Asia send you greetings. Aquila and Priscilla greet you warmly in the Lord, and so does the church that meets at their house" (1 Corinthians 16:19); "Give my greetings to the brothers and sisters at Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church in her house" (Colossians 4:15), etc.<sup>2</sup> Accordingly, these biblical records show that in the early

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2. Unless otherwise specified, all English biblical scriptures are cited from the New International Version (1984). Regarding Romans 16:11, Roland Y. K. Fung argues that Narcissus might not be a Christian Paul had greeted, but it is still possible that he had a church in his household because of Christian slaves. Roland Y. K. Fung, *Luo ma shu zhu shi xia juan* [A Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans, Volume 2: Commentary on Romans 9-16] (Taipei, Taiwan: Campus Press, 2013), 2218.

stages Christians met regularly in homes. The local church might therefore consist of smaller house churches in an area.

### The Suffering of Early Churches in the Bible

Given the early churches could be a cluster of local small house churches in the Roman Empire, another distinguishing feature of these churches was suffering. The early churches constantly faced the challenge of survival, which was in fact mainstream in New Testament times. The Apostle Paul wrote to the church at Thessalonica, “You became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you welcomed the message in the midst of severe suffering with the joy given by the Holy Spirit” (1 Thessalonians 1:6). The church was suffering; the term “suffering” in the New Testament “denotes not a mild discomfort, but great and sore difficulty.”<sup>3</sup> Accordingly, while his first epistle to the Thessalonians was silent on what kind of suffering or difficulty the church had encountered, it was the Jews that attacked the Apostle Paul on his first journey to Thessalonica (Acts 17:1-9), and the same people might therefore commit to disturbing the newly founded church.<sup>4</sup> As Jewish Christians suffered from the Jews, lately some pagans began to persecute the Gentile church (1 Thessalonians 2:14).<sup>5</sup> Further, in his second letter to the church Paul admired their preservation and faith in all precautions and trials (2 Thessalonians 1:3-5). He reported that the church evidently suffered for God’s kingdom that even all churches had known their endurance and acknowledged their authenticity as God’s

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3. Leon Morris, *The First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991), 48.

4. Morris, *Thessalonians*, 48.

5. Morris, *Thessalonians*, 48.

church.<sup>6</sup> Although enduring sufferings didn't merit the church's incorporation into the kingdom of God, one can't deny the Thessalonians were indeed a group of Christians surviving severe trials for His name's sake.<sup>7</sup>

The church of the Thessalonians was not a unique example of persecution. In 1 Thessalonians 2:14, Paul reports, "For you, brothers and sisters, became imitators of God's churches in Judea, which are in Christ Jesus: You suffered from your own people the same things those churches suffered from the Jews." Accordingly, all Jewish and Gentile churches suffered from persecution, and it was "a common lot of Christians"<sup>8</sup> in early church times. There were many other biblical accounts of the suffering of the church, such as,

Remember those earlier days after you had received the light, when you endured in a great conflict full of suffering. Sometimes you were publicly exposed to insult and persecution; at other times you stood side by side with those who were so treated. You suffered along with those in prison and joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property, because you knew that you yourselves had better and lasting possessions. (Hebrews 10:32-34)

The renowned scholar F. F. Bruce recalled what the author of the Hebrews may refer to here that in AD 49 the church was under persecution from the power of synagogues and pagan religions in Rome.<sup>9</sup> And some years earlier, the Jewish community, including Jewish Christians, had suffered exiles due to the emperor's order,<sup>10</sup> such as Priscilla and Aquila expelled from Rome (Acts 18:2). These Jews lost their

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6. Morris, *Thessalonians*, 82.

7. Morris, *Thessalonians*, 197-198.

8. Morris, *Thessalonians*, 81.

9. F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, NICNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), 270.

10. Bruce, *Hebrews*, 269.

homes in the cities in which they originally resided. They needed to relocate for jobs and livelihood (Acts 18:3). It is a similar situation for Chinese Christian immigrants in our times—the reasons may be different, but the challenges of displacement and survival are presumably very similar.

In the book of Revelation, for another example, some churches were apparently confronted with suffering and persecution. The letter to the church in Smyrna (Revelation 2:8-11) indicates the challenges of the Smyrna church were poverty, slander from the Jews, and jail due to faith. Therein the issue of finance became a focus since the Son of Man highlighted such a crisis, but admonished the church to see things from the other side—“yet you are rich” (Revelation 2:9). The church in Smyrna could be an encouragement to those small churches suffering from financial crises—as the Lord knew the Smyrna church’s situation, he knows theirs.

Accordingly, small churches could also reflect on their financial difficulty in an alternative way as the Smyrna church did. But one may ask, first of all, why the Smyrna church fell into poverty. The church’s poverty did not come from the city itself—Smyrna was one of the richest cities in the Ancient Near East. It was from the persecution through the Jews who followed the mainstream culture of pagan religions—the local Jews were associated with the Roman authorities plundering Christians’ property as the book of Hebrews mentions.<sup>11</sup>

Apparently, since financial crises had once threatened the first-century church, it is hardly a new threat for small churches today to survive similar challenges. As far as

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11. Wei Luo, *Qi shi lu zhu shi shang* [Revelation, Volume 1] (Taipei, Taiwan: China Evangelical Seminary Press, 2007), 421.

this thesis-project is concerned, one of the purposes of the survey is to know what makes it difficult for a small church to survive the status quo. In the New England area, few states have suffered from economic downturns. According to U.S. News and World Report, for example, Massachusetts was ranked the best state for economics in the country.<sup>12</sup> Thus, the story of Smyrna informs that while social factors may directly impact a church's vitality, a small church's financial problems may not solely be attributed to outside economic conditions. Financial challenges come in many forms. For example, shortage of offering, for whatever reasons, may often exaggerate a crumbling financial foundation.

Not only facing financial turmoil, the Smyrna church represents the church history of martyrdom. Polycarp (AD 69-155), the bishop of Smyrna, was burned alive.<sup>13</sup> No wonder Christ encouraged the church by reminding them that he is the one who died and was raised to life again (Revelation 2:8), and admonished, “be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life” (Revelation 2:10). Although persecution was severe and martyrdom was in view, Christ promised the church eternal life (Revelation 2:11). He did not plan to relieve the church from its mishaps and sacrifice. He just asked the church to be faithful during sufferings. So, the church not only lost financial stability but underwent martyrdom. And Christ simply ordained such a

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12. Carl Stevens, “We’re #1: US News & World Report Ranks Massachusetts Best State,” CBS Boston, February 28, 2017, accessed November 15, 2018, <http://boston.cbslocal.com/2017/02/28/Massachusetts-best-state-in-nation-us-news-world-report-economy-education-health-care/>.

13. Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, Revised, NICNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), 75-76.

future for it, at least for the time being.<sup>14</sup> In all, the church's suffering was multi-faceted and difficult.

Conclusively, contrary to our modern understanding of a “successful church” (which may refer to a church with a strong financial foundation or significant membership), the Smyrna church serves as an antithesis. Its story of endurance of persecution goes against the contemporary church culture of the pursuit of growing faster and larger. From this viewpoint, the small church must learn to persist in all kinds of suffering as part of life, so that it may deserve the life the Lord promises the Smyrna church and all churches faithfully standing for severe trials.

The early church also needed to address some other issues. The church of Sardis (Revelation 3:1-6), for example, was another case concerning small church life and the matter of survival. Accordingly, the church suffered from an internal problem: spiritual death.<sup>15</sup> Like a prodigal son, the church went astray to the point that the father even claimed the son was dead (Luke 15:24).<sup>16</sup> But why? Wei Lo suggests that at the time the church wasn't cautious of the influence from the world.<sup>17</sup> The Sardis church encountered an invasion from heresy; the result was devastating.<sup>18</sup> From Christ's point of view, the church was simply dying (Revelation 3:1). But there was some hope. The Lord claimed that, “Yet you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their clothes” (Revelation

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14. Mounce, *Revelation*, 76. Cf. v. 10, “You will suffer persecution for ten days” may refer to a limited time of suffering, according to Mounce.

15. Mounce, *Revelation*, 93.

16. Mounce, *Revelation*, 93.

17. Luo, *Revelation*, 495.

18. Luo, *Revelation*, 495.

3:4). He warned the church to “strengthen what remains and is about to die” (Revelation 3:2). There were still a few people, the remnant, in the church, who did not conform to the world or give in to the temptation of heresy. Given dye manufacturing was the mainstream business in Sardis, the remnant was the symbol of the faithful Christians who refused to comply with the world’s orders, or they could be secularized as defiled clothes.<sup>19</sup> Therein the pressure of the church’s survival piled high, but Christ was convinced that the faithful remnant in Sardis “will walk with me, dressed in white, for they are worthy” (Revelation 3:4), which was a triumph against the world’s dominion represented by the Roman regime.<sup>20</sup> These worthy Christians were survivors—although time was harsh, the environment was hostile, and faith was shaken, yet there was a remnant living as a “little flock” of Jesus (Luke 12:32). As the Sardis remnant, the small church today may follow the admonition they received from Christ to be alert and repentant, and to be complete in deeds and stay away from the world’s pollution, so as to be remembered in the book of life (Revelation 3:5).

#### Historical Evidence of the Persecuted Church

From a historical perspective, the early church had fulfilled the biblical revelation about suffering and persecution. Herein the Roman authority played a main role in the churches’ mishaps. Persecution all of a sudden became an official, systematic, and nationwide policy.<sup>21</sup> From regional to the national level, the policy affected Christians in

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19. Mounce, *Revelation*, 95.

20. Mounce, *Revelation*, 96.

21. Bill Austin, Chinese trans. K. W. Ma, and Hui Kin Yan, *Ji du jiao fa zhan shi* [Austin’s Topical History of Christianity] (Hong Kong: Seed Press, 1991), 61.

every corner of the empire.<sup>22</sup> Bruce conclusively reports that after the great fire of Rome at AD 64, Christians' deaths were "made a matter of sport: they were covered in beasts' skins and torn to pieces by dogs; or were fastened to crosses and set on fire in order to serve as torches by night when daylight failed...Christian women had to enact the parts of Dirce and the daughters of Danaus."<sup>23</sup> Even before the persecution under Nero's regime, the church was attacked directly or indirectly. In AD 41 Claudius imposed certain restrictions on the Jewish colony in Rome.<sup>24</sup> For eight years the emperor laid down even more severe laws to expel the Jews from the capitol because they were found to be involved in some sort of riots against authority, which the government claimed the Jews and Christians were responsible for those uprisings.<sup>25</sup> The incident might explain the biblical account of the exile of the Jews and Jewish Christians such as Priscilla and Aquila, one of the earliest records of persecution under the Roman regime.<sup>26</sup>

Bill Austin reports that the fifth-century church historian Orosius once divided the persecution of the church into ten periods.<sup>27</sup> Nero (AD 54-68) blamed Christians for the Great Fire of Rome. He was the first emperor to treat Christians as criminals simply because of their faith, and signed punishment and execution into law. Church tradition claims Paul and Peter were martyred under Nero's reign. Domitian (AD 81-96) instituted emperor worship and gave himself the title of *Dominus et Deus*. Toward the end of his

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22. Austin, *History*, 61.

23. Bruce, *Hebrews*, 268.

24. Bruce, *Hebrews*, 269.

25. Bruce, *Hebrews*, 269.

26. Bruce, *Hebrews*, 269.

27. Austin, *History*, 61-66.

regime he persecuted Jews and Christians. Tradition teaches he banished John to the island of Patmos (Revelation 1:10). Trajan (AD 98-117) put severe restrictions on secret societies and when the roman provincial governors found the church gathering they enforced strict laws upon Christians. In 112, the emperor officially condemned Christianity as an illegal religion, and the policy became the basis of persecution throughout the empire. Marcus Aurelius (AD 161-180) committed mass persecution in Lyons. During that time Justin Martyr was put to death in Rome. In AD 202, Septimius Severus banned Christianity. He took responsibility for the execution of an African female Christian named Perpetua. Maximus Thrax (AD 235-238) proclaimed believers were the “enemy of gods” and blamed them for earthquakes, evoking public hostility toward Christians. He was especially notorious for executing bishops. Only two years on the throne, Decius (AD 249-251) unfolded the first systemic persecution of Christians by executing the Roman bishop in AD 250 and following up with a decree that all nationals ought to submit proof of religious sacrifice to the emperor and Roman deities. He apparently targeted Christians because at the time Christianity was becoming a serious threat to the empire. Many Christians were killed. In AD 257 Valerian (AD 253-260) tried to hinder church growth in a moderate way. He expelled some priests and leaders, confiscated their property, and banned churches from meeting. When those efforts failed, he publicly executed those priests and leaders who declined to renounce their faith. Two of the martyrs were the Roman bishop Sixtus II and Cyprian of Carthage. In the time of Aurelian (AD 270-275) the emperor ceased to persecute the church. Nevertheless, although growing in numbers, it was the church that lived in a worldly manner full of disputes and factions. The church waited for the final and most serious persecution from

Diocletian (AD 284-305). In ten years of persecution, countless Christians were put to death by savage executions. They were forced to eat food scarified to idols, or starved to death. Many of them were placed in colosseums, being consumed by the beasts. Church historian Eusebius survived the trials. He also witnessed the long period of persecution and the heroic stories of the martyrs. He concluded that the bloody knife of the executioner became blunt and broken, and even the executioner got tired, but the believers still had some breath left and continued to praise and give thanks to God.

### Conclusion

All in all, church began with small congregations regularly meeting at homes. At the early stage of church development, however, these small churches suffered from all sorts of persecutions. For a long period, the Roman Empire systematically cracked down on churches. Christians bore property loss, were discriminated against, tortured, and murdered. Yet, the Bible and history have proven the church ultimately survived the suffering against all odds.

### The Jerusalem Church

As the first Christian church in history, the Jerusalem church, with its rich biblical and historical heritages, will benefit any study of church ministry.<sup>28</sup> When one ponders small churches facing challenges, the study of the Jerusalem church is particularly rewarding due to a common origin and similar *Sitz im Leben*. Yet the following section of

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28. Bruce, *The Church of Jerusalem*, 5. Prof. Bruce's dissertation is informative. He explains persuasively how the Jerusalem church had a promising start yet eventually faded from history.

this chapter will especially reflect on how the church responded to its challenges at the time.

### The Challenges in the Jerusalem Church

In Acts 6:1-7, the first problematic incident affecting the whole congregation was due to distribution of food for the Grecian Jews. This event, however, indicated the original church structure consisted of multi-ethnic groups, the Hebrew and Hellenic Jews. Unfortunately, a conflict arose between the two church groups. Later, the apostles dealt with the issue by electing Grecian leaders to serve their own people.<sup>29</sup> The result was welcomed by the whole church, and the problem was solved.

Yet when one of the elected Hellenic almoners, Stephen, was persecuted and put to death (Acts 6:8-15; 7), the church was confronted with challenges from the outside. Nevertheless, upon Stephen's persecution, some scholars believed that the impact was limited to the members related to Stephen, or to the Hellenic group as a whole.<sup>30</sup> The limitation of the initial attack suggests why the apostles and the Hebrew Jews could be less affiliated with Stephen's trial, so as to remain in the Jerusalem church. But the text itself says that the persecution was largely applied to almost all church members, and Hebrew and Hellenic Christians, except the apostles, were "scattered throughout Judea and Samaria" (Acts 8:1). At any rate, the diaspora implies that at least for a period of

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29. Bruce, *The Church of Jerusalem*, 9.

30. For the former, see I. Howard Marshall, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1980), 151. For the latter, Bruce, *The Church of Jerusalem*, 9.

time the Jerusalem Church was losing its members and regular meetings. Possibly a great deal of members were forced to leave the church.

Owing to the great displacement, the existence of the Jerusalem church was at stake. Even the apostles fled away from Jerusalem during the assault of Saul of Tarsus.<sup>31</sup> Fortunately, the persecution only lasted a short time, and then the apostles secretly returned to the city.<sup>32</sup> During the absence of the apostles, the Jerusalem church lacked of leadership and was no more at the time. Later when the apostles resumed their ministry in Jerusalem (Acts 8:1, 14), they engaged in only Gentile missions, not pastoral ministry due to limited membership. Not until the conversion of Saul of Tarsus could one once again find the Jerusalem Christians (Acts 9:26, 28). At the time the crisis of survival of the church seemed to quiet down for a while, when “the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace...and...grew in numbers” (Acts 9:31). If the church of Jerusalem also enjoyed such a peaceful time, it got an opportunity to re-build itself till the next round of persecution upon the arrival of the Apostles James and Peter (Acts 12:1-17). After the miraculous release of Peter and the sudden death of the persecutor (Herod Agrippa I), the church revived and “the word of God continued to increase and spread” (Acts 12:24).<sup>33</sup>

As the Jerusalem Church developed, trials and tribulations followed. This time, famine, predicted by the prophet Agabus, would “spread over the entire Roman world...during the reign of Claudius” (Acts 11: 28). Jerusalem suffered more severely

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31. Marshall, *Acts*, 152.

32. Marshall, *Acts*, 152.

33. Marshall, *Acts*, 207.

than other places, since collecting donations from foreign churches for the mother church in Jerusalem had become a major course in the apostolic ministry (e.g., Barnabas and Saul in Acts 11:30; 12:25). Even more, the Apostle Paul led the Roman and Asian churches to deal with the poverty of the Jerusalem Church:

Now, however, I am on my way to Jerusalem in the service of the Lord's people there. For Macedonia and Achaia were pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the Lord's people in Jerusalem. (Romans 15:25-26)

Now about the collection for the Lord's people: Do what I told the Galatian churches to do. On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with your income...Then, when I arrive, I will give letters of introduction to the men you approve and send them with your gift to Jerusalem. If it seems advisable for me to go also, they will accompany me. (1 Corinthians 16:1-4)

And now, brothers and sisters, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. In the midst of a very severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the Lord's people. (2 Corinthians 8:1-4)

But I am sending the brothers in order that our boasting about you in this matter should not prove hollow, but that you may be ready, as I said you would be. For if any Macedonians come with me and find you unprepared, we—not to say anything about you—would be ashamed of having been so confident. So I thought it necessary to urge the brothers to visit you in advance and finish the arrangements for the generous gift you had promised. (2 Corinthians 9:3-5)<sup>34</sup>

Accordingly, to relieve the Jerusalem church from famine, Paul urged the world churches to give as much as they could for the mother church. Concerning the Gentile churches' charity, he claimed, "They were pleased to do it, and indeed they owe it to them. For if the Gentiles have shared in the Jews' spiritual blessings, they owe it to the

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34. Although one can't find in these paragraphs the name of the Jerusalem church, what Paul urges in chapters 8-9 is for the Corinthian church's completion of their contribution to the church of Jerusalem. Cf.: Paul Barnet, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), 31, 388ff. Che Bin Tan, *Tien dao sheng jing zhu shi ge lin duo ho shu* [2 Corinthians, Tien Dao Bible Commentary] (Hong Kong: Tien Dao, 2003), 31, 234ff.

Jews to share with them their material blessings” (Romans 15:27). To Paul, because of a spiritual relationship, the world churches were obligated to subsidy the mother church—“At the present time your plenty will supply what they need, so that in turn their plenty will supply what you need” (2 Corinthians 8:14). This was to say, keeping fellowship between the world churches and the Jerusalem church was essential in the apostle’s mind.

### Pastoral Ministry after the Diaspora of the Jerusalem Church

After the great displacement of the Jerusalem church, the apostles’ leadership and pastoral ministry for a suffered church sheds light for fellow small churches and pastors who face similar adversity today. As mentioned, the apostles possibly returned to the church after the diaspora. Then, how would they resume pastoral ministry? Mostly the apostles continued their ministry by visiting newborn Christian churches outside Jerusalem (e.g., Acts 8:14ff) to “exercise a general supervision over the progress of the gospel where it might be carried.”<sup>35</sup> I. Howard Marshall suggests the apostles’ visit was both to inspect the new development of mission and to accept the new Gentile converts for fellowship with the Hebrew Christians of the Jerusalem church.<sup>36</sup> And it became routine for the leadership and remnant of the church that they send apostles to visit churches; Peter and John were for Samaria (Acts 8:14), and Barnabas went to Antioch (Acts 11:22). Meanwhile, they checked on the development of Peter’s evangelism to Cornelius (Acts 10; 11:1-18). Every time the gospel advanced, one can see the leadership

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35. F. F. Bruce, *The Book of Acts*, NICNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1988), 168.

36. Marshall, *Acts*, 140-41. Also, Bruce suggests at the time only Hebrew Christians remained in the Jerusalem church. Bruce, *The Church of Jerusalem*, 9.

of the Jerusalem church overseeing any new movement. Conclusively, although no longer a church with a large membership, the leadership and remnant of the Jerusalem church still played a leading role at this early stage of missions.<sup>37</sup> That was to say, regardless of the difficulties, the smaller and suffering Jerusalem church carried on the task relentlessly. From this perspective, small churches today can learn from the mother church and its pastoral leadership that no matter what obstacles they have they should do what they are capable of now.

### The Fall of the Jerusalem Church

Yet, according to Bruce, the history of the Jerusalem church, especially for its final disappearance in the seventh century, could teach us more about small church theology.<sup>38</sup> Why did the promising Jerusalem church, the mother church of the world churches, eventually disappear in the flow of history? His analysis can help small churches today understand why some churches become smaller and weaken in this

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37. Scholars debate the possible number of Jewish believers in the city of Jerusalem at the time of Paul's visit in Acts 21:17ff—James, the Lord's brother, and the elders of the church claimed to Paul, "You see, brother, how many thousands of Jews have believed, and all of them are zealous for the law" (Acts 21:20). Bruce believes these "zealots for the law" were many Hebrew Christians of the Jerusalem church (Bruce, *The Church of Jerusalem*, 10). Meanwhile others think it was not so possible for there to be thousands of Hebrew Christians in the city because the population of Jerusalem was much smaller (Marshall, *Acts*, 321). This author believes the remnant of the church would not be as many as thousands due to the Jewish and Roman authorities still actively in power. There was no sign of the authorities backing off of their persecution of Jerusalem Christians, especially in light of Paul's arrest and trial later. Further, when the arrest occurred in the Holy Temple, it invoked "the whole city" (Acts 21:30) coming to seize the apostle. The mob was not the Hebrew Christians, but possibly the "zealots for the law"—opposite to Bruce, the phrase may generally refer to the Jews rooted in Judaism and living in the greater Jerusalem area.

38. Bruce, *The Church of Jerusalem*, 11-14.

regard. The following reasons are given for the fall of the Jerusalem church: (1) cultural uniformity, (2) repressive view of soteriology, (3) legalism, and (4) exclusivism.<sup>39</sup>

In Bruce's view, the church originated from cultural diversity between Hebrew and Hellenic Christians. And yet when the dispersion of the Hellenists took place, the church became homogenous in culture and theology, resulting in losing its impact on the surrounding community in Roman society.<sup>40</sup> The church was less vigorous due to its lack of diversity; its theology and practice were inclined to be more conservative and passive. When the Gentile believers increased, the church pursued doctrinal purity rather than adventure for the mission. Consequently, the church laid down strict conditions for the Gentiles. The result of the Council at Jerusalem seemed to prove that James, and perhaps the Hebrews of the church, wanted the Gentile believers to obey the Mosaic Laws (i.e., Acts 15:20-21). Another example was that when Peter reported to the church how the Gentiles had begun to convert, he immediately confronted those "circumcised believers" who criticized his mission to "the uncircumcised men" (Acts 11:1-2). Time and again, one could see such criticism not only undermining the apostolic missions, but restraining the church from a proactive attitude to the Gentiles. Marshall agrees with Bruce on this point, "It does look as though new advances were examined with care in the church at Jerusalem, and we certainly get the impression of a conservative body which was never responsible for any new ventures itself."<sup>41</sup> From this viewpoint, what could harm the

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39. Bruce, *The Church of Jerusalem*, 11-14.

40. Bruce, *The Church of Jerusalem*, 11.

41. Marshall, *Acts*, 156.

church's ministry was a theological preference, i.e., a 'repressive view of soteriology,' as mentioned.

Such an exclusive theology resulted in a tendency toward legalism. Although with a sound motivation to retain purity, the Jerusalem church—mainly consisting of Hebrew Christians who either previously practiced Judaism (e.g., the priests, Acts 6:7), or were once related to Pharisees—was inclined to lay down regulations for the Gentile believers.<sup>42</sup> Conclusively, the living words of God became a book of rules. The church ignored Christian liberty as the foundation of apostolic gospel. Also, given the various backgrounds and the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the church gave up the flexibility of application of doctrine, especially for the Gentiles. Because of a deep root in Judaism the church brought in traditionalism.<sup>43</sup> Therefore, the church complained that Paul made conversion too easy for the Gentiles—only through confessing Jesus as Lord and accepting baptism in his name.<sup>44</sup> To qualify the brotherhood with Hebrew Christians, the church then argued that a genuine conversion for the Gentiles should additionally confess Judaism (e.g., circumcision).

At the time, the leadership of the church changed. Owing to the apostles leaving on mission, a group of the elders, including James, the brother of Jesus, filled the vacancy. As mentioned, such an eldership was in favor of Judaism. Consequently, perhaps affected by the elders, some Hebrew Christians then commissioned themselves to spread their "perverted gospel," which ultimately led to conflicts with Paul the apostle

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42. Bruce, *The Church of Jerusalem*, 9, 12.

43. Bruce, *The Church of Jerusalem*, 9.

44. Bruce, *The Church of Jerusalem*, 12.

(Galatians 1:6ff). Again, to safeguard the purity of the church, the Hebrew Christians’ “different gospel” inevitably became a form of legalism to prevent Gentile believers from being welcomed into the one holy catholic church. Moreover, their legalism innately turned to exclusivism, resulting in weakening the church itself. The church eventually left the city of Jerusalem because of a Jewish revolt against Rome in AD 66; it then went into dispersion in Transjordan areas.<sup>45</sup> The remnant resumed the church by following the leaders associated with James’s relatives for several centuries. But in the later years the church was excluded from both the Jewish and Christian communities because of its unorthodox doctrines—to the Jews, the church had gone astray from Judaism; to Christians, it tended to legalism. In the end, when Islam took over the Transjordan area and Egypt in the seventh century, the Jerusalem church disappeared altogether.<sup>46</sup>

In light of small church theology, the Jerusalem church exemplifies a church’s life and death. With a promising beginning, the Jerusalem church should have been a leading model for its robust foundation of apostolic teachings, fellowship, worship, charity, and witness.<sup>47</sup> Likewise, suppose that there was a small church started with strong commitment of a group of Christians. In the early days the church grows and increases in numbers. But somehow the growth becomes stagnant. The church then gradually loses vitality, as A. W. Tozer once described, a “rut church” unable to break the status quo.<sup>48</sup> The following questions are therefore offered to discern whether the same problems of

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45. Bruce, *The Church of Jerusalem*, 11.

46. Bruce, *The Church of Jerusalem*, 11.

47. Bruce, *The Church of Jerusalem*, 6.

48. A. W. Tozer, *Rut, Rot or Revival: The Condition of the Church* (Camp Hill, PA: Christian Publication, 1992).

the Jerusalem church take place in small churches today: Did the church become smaller because of a lack of ethnic or cultural diversity? Did the church become exclusive, subscribing to social or theological favoritism? Or, would the church's tight relationship with one another become an obstacle for new participants, failing to incorporate as one congregation? These issues could cause a church to become unwillingly smaller or insignificant as a result. Although with distinct identity, character, and strength, a small church should rethink its theology particularly in this regard.

### **A Theology of the Small Church**

This author will consider the small church for its specific features and theological concerns. A biblical theme of the Remnant lays down the foundation for the church today. Further, the history of the Remnant and the early church points out the church's distinction of displacement.

#### **The Remnant**

The history of small churches can be traced back to "The Remnant" in the Old Testament. The small immigrant church not only originates from the mother church of Jerusalem, but is rooted in the biblical remnant, a migration of God's people. The story of the Patriarchs and Moses reports how an immigrant family from Mesopotamia became the nation of Israel. And yet the history of Israel unfolds with how the people were raised up as a kingdom, but fell as the Remnant. Many prophets foresaw the Israelite Remnant; they also prophesied its future in crisis of survival. In some biblical sense, the investigation of the Remnant can help us understand small church.

But, first of all, the remnant idea can be defined as “whenever life and existence are threatened with destruction...the remnant is the means by which the continuity of life and existence is preserved for the future.”<sup>49</sup> Likewise, small church looks for continuity in the ministry in its distinct social context and tries to preserve its spiritual life. Among Israel’s prophets, Isaiah wrote a great account of the remnant. In his narrative in Isaiah 6, for example, the remnant idea appears in God’s judgment of and salvation for his people.<sup>50</sup> Owing to the people’s “hardening hearts” (Isaiah 6:9, 10), the remnant there served as the result of God’s punishment.<sup>51</sup> God’s judgments were severe against the people’s rebellion, so that “as the terebinth and oak leave stumps when they are cut down, so the holy seed will be the stump in the land” (Isaiah 6:13). Although “stumps” and “holy seed” symbolized the remnant, the phrase was used negatively to foretell the severe outcomes of the punishment.<sup>52</sup> Yet, the promise of salvation would come from the holy seed, namely, the remnant, as a new life. God punished the people, but intended to save; destroyed, but would rebuild through the remnant.<sup>53</sup> So, remnant theology serves as a twofold purpose for Israel—that God punished the nation for its rebellion, but “a holy people will sprout out of the remaining root stock. It will be holy, for it has experienced cleansing judgment.”<sup>54</sup>

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49. Gerhard F. Hasel, *The Remnant: The History and Theology of the Remnant Idea from Genesis to Isaiah* (Berrien Springs, MI.: Andrews University Press, 1972), 100.

50. Hasel, *The Remnant*, 224.

51. Hasel, *The Remnant*, 229ff.

52. Hasel, *The Remnant*, 239-40.

53. Hasel, *The Remnant*, 244-45.

54. Hasel, *The Remnant*, 247.

Given a different context, however, the presence of the small church was not a result of God's punishment. On the contrary, as the following will survey, small churches can be the extension of a biblical tradition of the faithful remnant. Nevertheless, small churches in New England might somehow reflect the decline of Christianity as people here have become more secular in recent years.<sup>55</sup> Small churches unintentionally kept themselves small in membership, ministry, and others. But their smallness generally results from the less religious life of the New Englanders. Just like Isaiah dealt with the diminishing of Yahweh worship among the ancient Israelites, small churches live in a secular environment where people are not only leaving church but getting rid of religion altogether. From this perspective, small churches today may identify with the Israelite remnant due to their similar *Sitz im Leben*, and a common hope of eschatological revival.

Indeed, remnant theology is embedded in Isaiah's eschatology, although Israel "will be destroyed but out of its remains a 'holy seed,' a purified, believing and trusting remnant, will spring forth to new life."<sup>56</sup> This is because, "In that day the branch of the Lord will be beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the land will be the pride and glory of the survivors in Israel" (Isaiah 4:2).<sup>57</sup> The prophecy indicates the remnant would be fruitful and be restored in the land of Israel "in that day," a typically Isaianic phrase of eschatology.<sup>58</sup> Therefore, the remnant brought an eschatological promise in a sense

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55. Ed Stetzer, "New England: New Research and Analysis on America's Least Religious Region," *Christianity Today International*, March 21, 2013, accessed November 15, 2018, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2013/march/new-england-new-research-and-analysis-on-americas-least.html>. Accordingly, Connecticut is one of "the least religious states."

56. Hasel, *The Remnant*, 249-50.

57. Hasel and others think "the branch of the Lord" does not refer to the Messiah. See Hasel, *The Remnant*, 263.

58. Hasel, *The Remnant*, 263-64.

related to the small church today, especially when the two would share in the same hope of restoration and revival. In other words, when God preserved a holy seed for Israel—the Remnant—the promise encourages the small church today in a similar struggle, and a shared hope of survival. Small churches are therefore not isolated in the history of salvation, but an extension of the Remnant tradition from an eschatological perspective—accordingly, small church, in all its distress and difficulty, is all but a negative, hopeless failure of God’s people; on the contrary, it is a seed God mercifully reserves for restoration.

Nevertheless, the promise of the restoration through the remnant is conditional. For example, a remnant prophecy claimed “if you [i.e. the remnant] do not stand firm in your faith, you will not stand at all” (*Isaiah 7:9*).<sup>59</sup> The promise of salvation of the remnant “will depend on the decision to return to Yahweh in faith.”<sup>60</sup> In fact, it is of “an attitude of trust, confidence, and steadiness based upon one’s knowledge of God and his promises.”<sup>61</sup> Insofar as small church theology is concerned, living and serving in a smaller church is by all means of a matter of faith. This faith does not demonstrate a desperate endeavor to “save” the church, as small church pastors often do, but instead rest in the Lord, as *Isaiah 30:15* states, “This is what the Sovereign Lord, the Holy One of Israel, says: ‘In repentance and rest is your salvation, in quietness and trust is your strength.’” But, unfortunately, in their anxiety and worry, small church pastors often react in an opposite way, as the Lord rebuked Israel, “But you would have none of it. You said,

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59. Cf. *Isaiah 7:2-9*; Hasel, *The Remnant*, 283.

60. Hasel, *The Remnant*, 284.

61. Hasel, *The Remnant*, 283.

‘No, we will flee on horses.’ Therefore, you will flee! You said, ‘We will ride off on swift horses.’ Therefore, your pursuers will be swift!” (Isaiah 30:16). Israel’s security and future existence didn’t lie in military power, or diplomatic efforts, but trust in the Lord.<sup>62</sup>

In the history of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah, one sees the people repeatedly reject God’s offer and depend on their own futile plots seeking after security.<sup>63</sup> Parallel to the reaction of Israel, can small churches and their pastors conquer their inner fears of “failure” and a mentality of self-dependence so as to turn to the Lord in trustful rest? Or might they desperately look for solutions and yet fall into “trial-and-error” models, becoming restless in ministry and in spirit? Further, do pastors intend to be the rescuer, but forget to rely on the Savior? Do church and pastor lack confidence in the Lord? Small churches and their pastors should contemplate the above questions, particularly in the midst of crisis. After all, Remnant theology not only concerns the well-being of small churches, but provides redemptive thought for the pastor who often falls into the temptation of deleterious methodologies chasing after survival. Small churches and their pastors can survive these harmful practices and beliefs, but only if they share in Remnant promises, seeking a reliable relationship with the Lord.

### The Small Church of Displacement

Remnant theology reveals the character of the migration of God’s chosen people. From the time of Genesis one can read of the frequent displacement of the Israelite people from place to place. As one author describes, “From the beginning to end, the

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62. Hasel, *The Remnant*, 311.

63. Hasel, *The Remnant*, 312.

Hebrew Bible can be considered as a series of narratives, tales, and depictions of deportation and displacement...the Bible is the great meta-narrative of diaspora.”<sup>64</sup> The biblical history of Ezra-Nehemiah-Esther not only unfolds how the Lord fulfilled his promise to preserve the Remnant from the Babylon captivity, but takes account of the people geographically moving out of the Exile. It is estimated the remnant travelled three and half months for two thousand kilometers from Babylon to Palestine.<sup>65</sup> And long before the return, the Exilic era had changed the remnant’s language, career, religion, etc.<sup>66</sup> As immigrants need to adapt to a new environment, the Remnant, too, experienced similar changes in all aspects of life, and is just like the modern immigrant church in this regard. Furthermore, while one finds biblical footprints of the immigrant church through the Remnant in Old Testament history, the New Testament also depicts first-century churches characterized by migration. Apart from the church of Jerusalem mentioned above, “All except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. ...Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went” (Acts 8:1, 4). The church started to move out of the holy city to Samaria and beyond. Eventually, through the Jewish/Christian mission and migration, the gospel was spread to Asia Minor (e.g., Antioch, Acts 11:19ff; Corinth, Acts 18:1ff), Rome (Romans 16:3-5), and the rest of the Roman world where churches were widely established as a result. Accordingly, since the

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64. Brad E. Kelle, Frank Ritchel Ames, and Jacob L. Wright, ed., *Interpreting Exile: Displacement and Deportation in Biblical and Modern Contexts* (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011), 5.

65. Ting-Yu Chang, “Shi cong mi jia shu zhong tan tao yu min shen xue [To Explore the Remnant Theology from the Book of Micah]” (Master of Divinity dissertation, Taipei, Taiwan: Taiwan Graduate School of Theology, 2016), accessed November 15, 2018,  
[http://ir.taitheo.org.tw:8080/ir/bitstream/987654321/6164/2/MDIV%202016-2\\_張庭玉\\_全文.pdf](http://ir.taitheo.org.tw:8080/ir/bitstream/987654321/6164/2/MDIV%202016-2_張庭玉_全文.pdf).

66. Ting-Yu Chang, “Remnant.”

first century, Christian immigrants have had close ties with the church movement. Small immigrant churches, consequently, inherit such a feature of displacement.

### **A Theology of the Small Chinese Immigrant Church**

To establish a practical small Chinese church theology, the following survey considers two aspects of the church: characteristics of the Chinese immigrant church, and the dynamics of a small Chinese church, namely, what drives the church and what concerns the church. But, first of all, a short introduction to the history of American Chinese immigrants is helpful to learn the relationship between the Chinese church and immigrants.

According to Fenggang Yang, the history of the Chinese church has accompanied Chinese migration to America since the middle of the nineteenth century.<sup>67</sup> By the end of that century, eleven Protestant denominations in America had established ten churches, ten Chinese Christian associations, 271 Chinese Sunday schools, and missions in thirty-one states. These missions, however, were not very successful in converting the Chinese due to social factors, such as the Chinese Exclusion Act, or the policy of the mission churches only treating Chinese Christians as assistants of the Caucasian missionaries back to China.<sup>68</sup> There were no Chinese pastors at those churches. Not until the mid-twentieth century did some Chinese churches emerge through sponsorship from denominations, or were founded independently. Chinese pastors from China came to

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67. Fenggang Yang, *Chinese Christians in America* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania University Press, 1999), 5-7.

68. Chinese Exclusion Act (1882), accessed December 13, 2018, [https://www.ourdocuments.gov/print\\_friendly.php?flash=false&page=&doc=47&title=Chinese+Exclusion+Act+%281882%29](https://www.ourdocuments.gov/print_friendly.php?flash=false&page=&doc=47&title=Chinese+Exclusion+Act+%281882%29).

minister in these small churches which typically had fewer than 160 members. After World War II, Chinese immigrants began to move in and established more churches. From the 1950s to 1960s many Chinese students, mainly from Taiwan and Hong Kong, co-founded campus Bible study groups in colleges. Later, when the students were granted permanent residence under a new immigration act of 1965, these groups developed into churches. Chinese Christian immigrants then engaged in mission or church planting to form more churches afterwards. During the 1980s and 1990s, tens of thousands of Mainland China (People's Republic of China) students and scholars came to the United States, and were later awarded green cards. One of the main driving powers of such a numerous migration was when the United States Congress passed the Chinese Students Protection Act in 1992 in response to the Tiananmen Square protests of 1989— around 53,000 Chinese nationals acquired permanent resident status.<sup>69</sup> Accordingly, this new wave of Chinese immigrants settled down and became involved in Chinese church activities or Bible study groups nationwide, including in New England. By 1994, the number of Chinese churches had increased to 700.<sup>70</sup> Today, there are around 1700–1900 Chinese churches and Bible study groups currently in the United States.<sup>71</sup> Further, Christian churches have prevailed over Chinese Buddhist temples in terms of religious institutions in Chinese communities in the country, where 32% of ethnic Chinese are Christian, compared to 20% who identify themselves as Buddhists.<sup>72</sup> Such data may

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69. Yang, *Chinese Christians in America*, 40.

70. Yang, *Chinese Christians in America*, 6.

71. Chinese Church and Organization Directory, accessed November 15, 2018, <https://church.oursweb.net/slocation.php?w=5&c=US&a=;> Immanuel.net, accessed November 15, 2018, <http://www.immanuel.net/overseaschurch/>.

72. Yang, *Chinese Christians in America*, 7. By 1994 Chinese churches were around 700 whereas

suggest in general Chinese churches grow when the number of Chinese immigrants increases.<sup>73</sup>

Secondly, one may follow up with concerns of the distinctions of Chinese immigrants and church. According to Yang, there are two general features: theological conservatism and organizational independence.<sup>74</sup> For the former, about half of existing Chinese churches are affiliated with Evangelical denominations; therein, most of the denominational Chinese churches are associated with the Southern Baptist Convention and Christian and Missionary Alliance.<sup>75</sup> For the latter, reportedly many Chinese churches are independent, in terms of being a religious institution without a particular denominational affiliation. Even denominational Chinese churches are basically self-governing. In regards to theological tendency, the nondenominational Chinese churches similarly embrace a conservative view.<sup>76</sup> Accordingly, Chinese pastors and churches often downplay the difference among denominations, but identify themselves as Evangelicals against liberals.<sup>77</sup> On this point, to the pastor and church, one may say

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Chinese Buddhist temples and associations were fewer than 150 in number by 1996. The percentage data is dated 1997.

73. However, Buddhism in America has experienced similar trends while Chinese Buddhist immigrants increase in the country. See Yan Xiuyong, “Immigrant Buddhism breeds 4 million Buddhists in the United States,” Buddhist Channel, May 31, 2017, accessed December 13, 2018, <http://ifo.ifeng.com/44628085/news.shtml?srctag=pc2m&back>; The Buddhist Association of China, “Fo jiao zai mei guo [Buddhism in the United States],” accessed December 13, 2018, <http://www.chinabuddhism.com.cn/yj/2013-09-22/3760.html>.

74. Yang, *Chinese Christians in America*, 6.

75. Yang, *Chinese Christians in America*, 7.

76. Yang, *Chinese Christians in America*, 57.

77. Yang, *Chinese Christians in America*, 63.

“Evangelical Presbyterians are closer to evangelical Baptists than to liberal Presbyterians.”<sup>78</sup>

From this viewpoint, Chinese churches also share the same concern for the decay of Christianity in America.<sup>79</sup> Many Chinese believe that the United States is a Christian nation. But the Chinese church worries about secularism’s erosion of a Christian foundation of this country. Chinese Christians not only see themselves as an ethnic minority but a religious one, believing that the born-again Christians in this country are actually far fewer than ever.<sup>80</sup> Therefore, as a minority, it is easier for the Chinese church to identify with the Remnant, but further, a “twofold” – ethnic and religious – remnant. Along with the conservative view, the church also takes a pro-Republican socio-politico stance.<sup>81</sup> Nevertheless, the church might sometimes have opposite views from these groups, especially concerning immigration and minority issues. For example, recently in Massachusetts and Connecticut, Chinese Christians got involved in a heated debate about Asian Desegregation Legislation, a potential discrimination case toward Asian Americans in the name of equality of education.<sup>82</sup> Yet, besides individual incidents, the Chinese church in general clings to conservatism on theological and social issues.

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78. Yang, *Chinese Christians in America*, 63.

79. Yang, *Chinese Christians in America*, 122.

80. Yang, *Chinese Christians in America*, 121.

81. Yang, *Chinese Christians in America*, 125.

82. Hansi Lo Wang, “‘Racist Bill’? Chinese Immigrants Protest Effort to Collect More Asian-American Data,” NPR, August 5, 2017, accessed November 15, 2018, <https://www.npr.org/2017/08/05/541844705/protests-against-the-push-to-disaggragate-asian-american-data>; Chris Fuchs, “Connecticut bill would bar state from collecting student data from specific sub groups,” NBCNews, March 15, 2018, accessed November 15, 2018, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/asian-america/connecticut-bill-would-bar-state-collecting-student-data-specific-sub-n857121>; Overseas Chinese News Network, “Improperly dumb! More than a thousand Asians in New York hold the ‘Immigration Family Rights Parade,’” April 30, 2018, accessed November 15, 2018, <http://www.ccyn.com/client/ArticleDetails/135988?listid=65050>.

Besides a pro-conservative theology and institutional independence, the Chinese immigrant church also shares common characteristics with other immigration communities, such as identity issues. One author comments, “Most research on new Asian immigrant Christians focuses on either assimilation or ethnic preservation.”<sup>83</sup> Accordingly, whereas the problem of identity is still a great concern for Chinese immigrants in the church and society, one of the pronounced Chinese Christian authors, Rev. Dr. Samuel Tang, who wrote a book titled *Chinese Christians in North America*, may represent a symbolic viewpoint on assimilation and identify issues in the church.<sup>84</sup> In the book Dr. Tang argues that while assimilation is inevitable, it is necessary to maintain a Chinese identity among Chinese Christians, not only for the first generation of immigrants, but for the American-born or American-raised Chinese. “If we are totally westernized (i.e., Americanized), why bother to have a Chinese church?” he questions. He is convinced theologically that Chinese people were created by God for His glorious purpose. The Chinese people have a unique long history, and inherit a prominent “Frame of Mind” which God wants Chinese people to develop to make an impact in the world. Chinese culture is a good testimony to the gospel. In fact, Chinese people can identify closely with biblical Hebrews. For example, as the Jewish people suffered during the time of the diaspora, Chinese people experience a similar *Sitz im Leben*, migrating from place to place throughout the world. Chinese and Hebrews share oriental origins. It is easier for Chinese to understand Hebrew customs, and so forth. For these reasons,

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83. Ping Ren, “Church or Sect? Exploring a Church of New Chinese Immigrants in Southern California,” Marburg Journal of Religion 12, no. 1 (May 2007), accessed November 15, 2018, <http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.516.8526&rep=rep1&type=pdf>.

84. Samuel Tang, *Hua ren xin tu zai bei mei* [Chinese Christians in North America] (Paradise, PA: Ambassadors for Christ, 1986), 18-20, 24.

Chinese Christians should learn from the history of the Jews to keep their ethnic identity, including language and culture, their biblical way of education, and the distinct sense of being a chosen people. In practice, Dr. Tang strongly opposes the idea of sole English-speaking in Chinese churches, and encourages preaching and communication in Chinese among different generations. English in a Chinese church can only serve as a subsidy. Even in children's Sunday school the class should be taught in Chinese. In homes, Chinese only. All in all, he believes through these approaches Chinese Christians can preserve their ethnic identity, and boost self-confidence for younger generations.

In view of church development, Dr. Tang thinks identity issues will also affect church leadership and unity. For example, when children are younger, they may come to church with their Chinese parents. But when they grow up as an Americanized generation, they may be dissatisfied with being under Chinese-parental church leadership, hoping to be more independent in leadership and administration. This is because they may detect the nuanced differences between Americanized Chinese and Chinese immigrants. Eventually some second-generation Chinese Americans may form their own subgroup in the church, or even establish an independent church apart from the mother church.<sup>85</sup> Although one may not be totally convinced by Tang's observations and suggestions, at least his opinions reflect some fundamental concerns, or even anxiety, about assimilation and identity issues in the church.

Another related issue, as Yang rightly observes, is that while the Chinese church usually has three language groups (Mandarin, Cantonese, and English), the subgroups could sometimes conflict with one another for various reasons such as cultural nuance,

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85. Tang, *Chinese Christians*, 28-29.

creating a different dimension of identity crisis within the church.<sup>86</sup> In all aspects, what is seriously relevant to the church's existence and development is identity, which might therefore distinguish the Chinese church from other mainline churches.

### Small Chinese Church Dynamics

Although there exist plenty of books and research related to American small church study, research on small Chinese churches is obviously scarce in this regard.<sup>87</sup> Fortunately, few authors, such as Fenggang Yang, could fill in the vacancy. His study of The Chinese Christian Church of Greater Washington, D. C. (CCC), has provided an onsite observation, which symbolically describes an American Chinese church in crisis.<sup>88</sup> Further, since updated study of the Chinese church is inaccessible, other Chinese churches outside the United States may serve as correspondents. A group of dissertations titled *Small & Medium-sized Church: Identity, Struggle and Growth* from Hong Kong may satisfy the need for comparison with the Chinese church in New England.<sup>89</sup> Although social and church environments are different, small churches of the two places may have similar issues concerning survival and development due to the minority

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86. Yang, *Chinese Christians in America*, 43.

87. The fact of the absence of a systematic study is as Dr. Fenggang Yang reports, "I...try to find scholarly studies of Chinese Christians in America. Unfortunately, almost nothing existed then, except for an anthropologist's account...and passing fragments in studies of American Chinatowns." See Yang, *Chinese Christians in America*, 4. So far this author can only find some sociological research of American Chinese Christians like Dr. Yang's work, not to mention theological studies of Chinese churches in the United States.

88. Yang believes the church is "a typical Chinese church in many ways." Yang, *Chinese Christians in America*, 4ff.

89. See Simon Yiu-chuen Lee, ed., *Zhong xiao xing tang hui: shen fen, zheng zha yu zeng zhang* [Small & Medium-sized Church: Identity, Struggle and Growth] (Hong Kong: The Chinese University of Hong Kong, 2012).

population of Christianity, harsh competition with a secular society or bigger churches, leadership issues, etc. Further, reportedly 90% of Chinese churches in Hong Kong are small and mid-sized, under 200 to 500 members, a similar ratio here in the United States.<sup>90</sup> Therefore, as an equivalent, Hong Kong smaller churches may contribute to the research of the Chinese immigrant church in New England.

### *Conflicts*

No matter what the numerical size of the congregation is, Chinese churches need to deal with conflict. From a sociological perspective, Yang concludes, “given the diverse social and cultural backgrounds of the members, most tensions and conflicts in the immigrant Chinese church result from confusions and conflicts in the process of identity construction and reconstruction.”<sup>91</sup> Yang observes conflicts inside CCC. The church was established in the early 1970s. Years later, however, a schism split the church, taking away two hundred members, which was half of the congregation. The people who left then formed their own church. Twenty years later, again, a series of dissensions between various subgroups appeared. In the end, in a congregational meeting, the church even fired their senior pastor on site. Later, when looking back to the disputes, Yang believes one of the reasons could be excessive demands placed on the Chinese pastor.<sup>92</sup> Usually a Chinese pastor needs to suggest life wisdom for easing anxieties of the immigrants, and

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90. Lee, *Small & Medium-sized Church*, 21. Cf. Carl S. Dudley, *Effective Small Churches in the Twenty-first Century*” (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2003), 11.

91. Yang, *Chinese Christians in America*, 15.

92. According to Yang, Chinese pastors are required to explain Christian belief, provide a reasonable worldview, and make sense of the experience as immigrants in the new country. Yang, *Chinese Christians in America*, 59.

to ensure the congregation an acceptable identity in the American society.<sup>93</sup> Chinese Christians often rely on the pastor's preaching to meet these requirements. Sometimes, in a Chinese church, people may be dissatisfied with the content of the sermon and demand change. A potential tension can therefore develop between a pastor's supporters and opponents. If not relieved in time, speaking metaphorically, it often results in a landmine waiting for the next incident to explode.

Another common reason for conflict is church polity. CCC symbolically represents the case. The senior pastor and some leaders once asked for a permanent eldership through ordination by the church. They were convinced elders should have greater power than deacons in decision making. Whereas the church, evolved from a bible study group, came from a tradition of congregational government, the contention began to escalate among the eldership, deacons, and congregation. As mentioned, the pastor was forced to resign because of the division; consequently, the church broke apart. CCC's polity case is not unusual among Chinese churches.<sup>94</sup>

While institution may affect church, it is leadership problems that often cause conflicts and tension behind the scenes. Among the issues, the relationship between leaders is a critical one. In fact, regardless of the size of church, relational conflicts within

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93. Yang, *Chinese Christians in America*, 59.

94. This author experienced a similar conflict at a local Chinese Baptist church in Connecticut. A group of leaders wanted to be ordained as "permanent elders." In a decisive membership meeting, however, the congregation did not approve their petition. Members worried the leaders sought to aggrandize themselves with power to govern the church, which is contradictory to the Baptist custom of "congregational rule." As a result, the frustrated leaders began to look for a scapegoat to blame for their failed attempt. Unfortunately, as a young pastor, this author was an easy target. They believed the pastor competed with them for power. While the author was eventually forced to resign, some members also left the church in response to the leaders' tyrannical acts.

leadership have become the foremost reason for pastor's resignation.<sup>95</sup> Concerning relationship crises in church leadership, one concludes "the first and the last word of a team is relationship."<sup>96</sup> When the relationship of leaders turns negative, the struggle will influence the whole congregation.

Another conflict in Chinese churches may be related to personal cases, such as people unable to fit into church culture, or members involved in conflict with other members.<sup>97</sup> Further, some people choose to leave because of a difference in the understanding and practice of doctrines. For example, when a Christian who was baptized as an infant asks for membership in a Baptist church, it could become a tough issue regarding the church's fundamental belief or theology. In addition, as a small church, relationship among people is a core value in terms of the ministry. Particularly in a Chinese church, cohesiveness is rather stronger due to the immigrant identity and nature.<sup>98</sup> Therefore, when things, such as denominational or theological differences, kick in, church life can be filled with dilemma and turmoil. In the above case, on the one hand, if accepting the applicant as a member, some other members may worry about losing the basic Baptist tradition of "believer's baptism." On the other, rejecting the applicant can result in a relational crisis among supporters on both sides. Consequently, in view of individual incidents in a small Chinese church, no matter how small or personal, it may still cause a lot of distress if it involves doctrinal or relational difficulty.

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95. Lee, *Small & Medium-sized Church*, 53.

96. Lee, *Small & Medium-sized Church*, 55.

97. Lee, *Small & Medium-sized Church*, 21.

98. Lee, *Small & Medium-sized Church*, 94.

## *Development*

To a small Chinese church, development is a life and death issue. Small churches are eager to make breakthroughs. In a small-town context, however, the church's development seems limited. Compared to a big church, a small-town church lacks diversity in its population structure, confining the capability of breakthroughs in membership growth or financial stability. Usually small churches target mainly families. If there is no bigger campus or business around, the church could be quite isolated in this regard. Nevertheless, regarding development, a small church may focus on things other than membership or finance growth. When visiting a rural church on a Sunday at Isle of Skye in Scotland, the president of China Graduate School of Theology, Hong Kong, observed,

It was a church with only 30 people. But the sermon I heard that day was more than impressive. It was a well-prepared sermon. For a small congregation like this, the pastor delivered an honest message. It was a husbandry parish where livestock population was much more than humans. While the human population might remain the same, the pastor would serve only few members in coming years. His sermon, however, had made one thing clear, that he served that small church with heart. He probably asked not what the purpose of such a small church was, because he had learnt it was God's church, body of Christ, requiring his wholehearted ministry.<sup>99</sup>

Although the issue of development is crucial, a small church and its pastor need to rethink the purpose of the church of Christ.

Nevertheless, since many churches are eager to survive and develop, the story of successful big churches somehow becomes a new norm for church development. Scholars worry the trend of small business church development strategy may mislead the small church particularly when comparing to bigger ones in membership, finance, church

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99. Lee, *Small & Medium-sized Church*, 41.

building, etc.— the church could ignore its fundamental purpose as a Christian church.<sup>100</sup>

While it is all right to search for strategies of survival and development, the basic evaluation of pastoral or small church ministry is “faith auditing.”<sup>101</sup> In Reformation language, faith auditing considers primarily whether a pastor or church faithfully proclaims the words of God, actually performs sacraments in worship, and justly exercises church discipline, in discerning their genuineness as a Christian church.<sup>102</sup> In practice, small churches should also focus on the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20) to develop discipleship in the congregation.<sup>103</sup> Accordingly, whereas church development is essential in terms of survival, and big church strategy seems attractive and pragmatic, small churches ought to be faithful in proclaiming the biblical gospel and practice sound doctrines.

### *Partenership*

Small churches and leaders desire to create partnership. Churches and pastors rely on partnership to survive and develop. Even small churches should see big churches as partners, not competitors.<sup>104</sup> Each church has its unique character. Therefore, the whole church, made up of churches big or small, can help each other to serve people.<sup>105</sup> Besides,

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100. Lee, *Small & Medium-sized Church*, 42.

101. Lee, *Small & Medium-sized Church*, 43.

102. Lee, *Small & Medium-sized Church*, 43.

103. Lee, *Small & Medium-sized Church*, 157ff.

104. Lee, *Small & Medium-sized Church*, 19.

105. Lee, *Small & Medium-sized Church*, 19.

churches and pastors can partner with one another in many ways. There are numerous biblical accounts of partnership. For example, from Apostle Paul's personal greetings at the end of most of his epistles, evidently the apostle largely depended on partnership throughout his missionary and pastoral career.<sup>106</sup> In fact, church-wide cooperation and fellowship, such as the Jerusalem Church and the world churches as mentioned, has a long history. As a small church and pastor today, partnership is realistic in light of survival and development. For instance, owing to limited resources, small Chinese churches in Connecticut may have difficulty in holding a church retreat on their own. For many years, the New England Chinese Christian Conference (NECCC) has made it routine for the churches clustered to manage collective retreats.<sup>107</sup> Through partnership, small churches connect together as one body in Christ to share opportunities, resources, and burdens.

## Conclusion

To study small Chinese churches, first of all, the author has investigated the Early Church and its history. Church began with small congregations in homes. The development of the church, however, was characterized by a long-term struggle to survive. From the very beginning, the church suffers. And yet it eventually thrives in adversity, and continues its testimony and mission to the fallen world. Accordingly, the small church today relates to the early church in its fight for survival, regardless of inside and outside challenges.

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106. i.e. Romans 16.

107. 2016 New England Chinese Christian Conference, accessed November 15, 2018.  
[http://www.neccc.net/2016/index\\_en.html](http://www.neccc.net/2016/index_en.html).

Secondly, the lessons from the fall of the Church of Jerusalem teach the church today how legalism and exclusivism will result in a church's decline and even disappearance. In this view, the small church should avoid overemphasizing specific doctrine or tradition, allow flexibility for theological difference, and keep diversity of various cultures in a discerning way. Before striving to survive as a small church, it is significant to learn why church becomes small in the first place.

Thirdly, for the sake of small church theology, this author connects the small church with the biblical Remnant. Despise the Israelite remnant being a consequence due to the judgment of God, the people are in fact a symbol of God's gracious providence. In a sense the Remnant is his promise of renewal. Particularly, from an eschatological perspective, Christian churches, including small ones, are an extension and the fulfillment of such a promise. The Remnant promise encourages the small church to maintain a faithful relationship with the Lord in any circumstance. In addition, small churches may identify themselves with the Remnant due to a similar life experience of displacement.

Fourthly, to construct a theology of the small Chinese church, the author concludes three characteristics of the church: first of all, its immigrant nature. Historical data shows the church has grown with the Chinese immigration since the middle of the nineteenth century. The Chinese church is an immigrant church. Secondly, the Chinese church has a trend in conservative theology and organizational independence. In practice, the church identifies itself as Evangelical; further, it embraces a conservative social thought. As a minority and as Christians, the church experiences twofold migration: socially as they migrate from the mother country to the States, and spiritually from the earthly realm to God's kingdom. The church, therefore, considers itself a remnant

identified with the biblical Remnant. Finally, Chinese cultural identity still plays a major role in church life.

The other part of framing Chinese church theology is to observe real-life church dynamics through its conflicts, development, and partnership with other churches. First, since the church is characterized by close relationships, relational conflicts often cause the most serious outcomes. Meanwhile, leadership, church polity, and identity issues also contribute to the struggles. In all, the disputes in Chinese churches often tangle with relational issues. Secondly, small Chinese churches desperately seek for development. The church can learn from bigger churches for philosophy and strategies. But often the church and pastor ignore the biblical purpose of church, which is to share the gospel faithfully and carry on sound doctrine and ministerial practices. Finally, small Chinese churches rely on partnership with fellow churches to share resources, opportunities, and burdens. The small Chinese church and pastor should connect with one another to survive and grow together.

## CHAPTER 3

### LITERATURE REVIEW

The available bibliography dealing with the small Chinese Immigrant Church in North America is very limited. Further, the work that is available quite often focuses on questions of sociology rather than pastoral theology. For this reason the books that will be reviewed are *Shepherding the Small Church: A Leadership Guide for the Majority of Today's Churches*, by Glenn Daman; *Managing Church Conflicts* by Wally Yew and Cecilia Yau; *My Church is in Fact a Company* by Paul Andrew Ma; and *Churches Partnering Together: Biblical Strategies for Fellowship, Evangelism, and Compassion*, by Chris Bruno and Matt Dirks.<sup>1</sup> Two of the four books are written by Chinese ministers and thus deal directly with attributes of Chinese congregations. The other two tackle facets of ministry to small churches in general.

#### **Pastoral Leadership and Theology**

For small church pastors, one of the basic and foremost issues is how to initiate the ministry or what to do in a small church context. Glenn Daman's *Shepherding the Small Church: A Leadership Guide for the Majority of Today's Churches* lays down the foundation of small church ministry with six steps of spiritual construction. These steps are: 1) understand the culture of the church and community, 2) develop the theology of

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1. Glenn Daman, *Shepherding the Small Church: A Leadership Guide for the Majority of Today's Churches* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2008). Wally Yew and Cecilia Yau, *Jiao hui chong tu de chu li yu chong jian* [Managing Church Conflicts] (Petaluma, CA: CITIC United States, 2010). Paul Andrew Ma, *Tang hui que shi yi jian you xian gong si* [My Church is in Fact a Company] (Hong Kong: Logos, 2010). Chris Bruno and Matt Dirks, *Churches Partnering Together: Biblical Strategies for Fellowship, Evangelism, and Compassion* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014).

the church, 3) develop the character of the church by loving God and people, 4) develop the mission of the church with outreach, 5) discipleship and service, and 6) develop and implement the vision of the church.<sup>2</sup>

Small church pastors may overlook these essential aspects of the ministry but get involved in day-to-day church business without guidelines. Sometimes the pastor serves according to his or her instinct and experience, and doesn't forge a contextualized theology for helping to develop the ministry in a more integral way. Instead, Daman provides a systematical concept of doing small church ministry which can help the pastor and the church to rethink the way they see themselves, especially in areas such as relationship orientation, family style dynamics, democratic polity, strong involvement, family ties, etc.<sup>3</sup> Although Chinese churches share in most features of small churches in general, they are still different. For example, most Chinese immigrants have a background in higher education and possess more mobility because of job opportunities and relocation. For this reason it can be more difficult to build up a family network and long-term traditions in a small Chinese church. People are frequently moving in and out. Few families have the privilege of staying at a single church for generations.

In terms of ministry, first of all, the definition of success for a local church is never defined by its size but in the transformation that takes place in the church. An efficient church ministry is about transformation happening through God-centered theology and biblical practice, a genuine faith in God and his words, a loving fellowship inside and outside the church, a vibrant servanthood, and a relevant testimony to the

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2. Daman, *Shepherding the Small Church*, 7, 21-26.

3. Daman, *Shepherding the Small Church*, 43-51.

world. The task of the ministry, therefore, is to build up church theology, godly character, and biblical mission efficiently.<sup>4</sup> But before getting into the issues of development, the book offers various reasons for church underdevelopment. One of them is social issues, such as a nominal and static population in the community, and cultural barriers.<sup>5</sup> Daman's observations are consistent with the current challenges of Chinese churches in New England who are facing economic and population shifts that may impact small churches greatly.<sup>6</sup> Also, although the definition is different, cultural differences among congregations, as the author mentions, sometimes plays a negative role in hindering church progress.

Daman's church theology is Evangelical. He emphasizes a traditional theology and worldview in pastoral ministry. In the pressure to survive, small churches are tempted by unbiblical approaches to revive the ministry. Daman reminds his reader of the danger of "humanism in sheep's clothing," which deludes the church when it ignores the guidance of sound doctrine requiring biblical repentance and a genuine Christian life.<sup>7</sup> While small churches struggle to stay alive, a solid theological foundation is essential. In order to teach theology in a small church context to a modern congregation who is less attentive to orthodox theology, the pastor needs to teach theology in new ways.

The pastoral leadership must next develop the character of the church. The church is for the transformation of people toward a more Christ-like life.<sup>8</sup> A Christ-like character

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4. Daman, *Shepherding the Small Church*, 21.

5. Daman, *Shepherding the Small Church*, 52

6. Daman, *Shepherding the Small Church*, 62-63.

7. Daman, *Shepherding the Small Church*, 75-77.

8. Daman, *Shepherding the Small Church*, 88.

develops church leadership and ministry, and brings about God's blessings.<sup>9</sup> Therefore, to fulfill the purpose of the church and build up a godly character, small churches should cultivate a faithful, God-loving worship life, and loving relationships in the life of fellowship in the church.<sup>10</sup> Therein, Daman urges leaders and lay people to be devoted in prayer.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, small churches pray less than bigger churches with more prayer teams in the ministry holding numerous prayer meetings throughout the year.<sup>12</sup> Pastors and leaders in small churches are lured into prayer boredom when they don't see a fast resolution to troubles. In frustration, sometimes small churches even overlook prayer and rather choose to stay with the status quo, giving up diligent prayers they need most. Meanwhile, to prevent the failure of fellowship, the church should avoid self-centered campaigns such as church-hopping consumerism, inflexibility, pretense, or a judgmental mentality.<sup>13</sup> Small churches have been granted a particular opportunity to love one another in close relationship. Nevertheless, in real life, self-centered ambition often destroys a loving fellowship in the name of ministry.

Small churches develop mission through witnessing, discipleship, and service.<sup>14</sup> Daman argues that numerical growth might not be the consequence of evangelism or

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9. Daman, *Shepherding the Small Church*, 89-91.

10. Daman, *Shepherding the Small Church*, 94ff.

11. Daman, *Shepherding the Small Church*, 106ff.

12. Cf. Bread of Life Christian Church in Taipei, accessed November 15, 2018, <https://www.breadoflife.taipei/en>; The Taipei Lingliangtang Prayer Center, accessed November 15, 2018, <http://web.bolcc.tw/Ministry/praying>.

13. Daman, *Shepherding the Small Church*, 126-28.

14. Daman, *Shepherding the Small Church*, 145ff.

marks of God's blessings.<sup>15</sup> The church is called to testify to the gospel faithfully, but only God can bestow growth in numbers. In other words, the small church is called to proclaim the good news, not to convert the seekers, which is solely the work of God.<sup>16</sup> Hence, small churches do not need to struggle with numerical increase. If a small church cannot grow in numbers, however, a direct hit may impact its manpower, finance, and other aspects of the ministry. Although numbers may be not the most crucial signs of a vital church, it goes without saying lack of growth in a practical sense leads to decline and even die out, just like human life. It is hard for small church leadership not to think of some inner problems causing low numerical growth.

Finally, small church must develop vision. First, Daman distinguishes vision from mission.<sup>17</sup> Vision combines the mission and purpose of church in its context.<sup>18</sup> He encourages consensus from the whole congregation literally to write down their church vision, mission, and purpose statements.<sup>19</sup> Different from big churches where the senior pastor and other leaders typically coin the church vision, Daman suggests a dynamic of communication to search for vision as a small church collectively. This way of vision finding may enhance not only consent but fellowship. For small Chinese churches, vision is even more crucial because it is often omitted while the church is busy dealing with various crises.

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15. Daman, *Shepherding the Small Church*, 146-47.

16. Daman, *Shepherding the Small Church*, 146-147.

17. Daman, *Shepherding the Small Church*, 145.

18. Daman, *Shepherding the Small Church*, 210.

19. Daman, *Shepherding the Small Church*, 222ff, 226ff, 266.

## **Conflict Resolution in Chinese Churches**

The authors of *Managing Church Conflicts* boldly attempt to sort out one of the toughest problems in Chinese churches. Church has a long history of conflict.<sup>20</sup> Conflict comes from tension. Usually people devoted in church ministry create tension, because they have contradictory opinions and worldviews, insisting their own way is God's will.<sup>21</sup> From another perspective, just like concentric circles, tension and conflict exit on personal, interpersonal, church, and cultural levels. These factors will affect church life and ministry on issues such as clergy hiring and evaluation, co-laborer relationships and leadership, and power and authority. Conflict concerns personal spiritual lives and even spiritual warfare.<sup>22</sup> To resolve tension, in the first place, one must be aware of the characteristics and multifaceted nature of conflict.

Authors Yew and Yau find the pastor often falls into the center of tension and conflict.<sup>23</sup> It is difficult for pastors to serve in Chinese churches in America. For pastors, it is a challenge to gain respect from members with backgrounds in high-level education and gifted characteristics, especially in a climate of democracy. To prevent conflicts, therefore, the church needs to respect and appreciate the pastor's calling, personality, gifts, and family. Members learn to understand the pastor's ministry and needs. All have to protect the pastor's reputation. The book mentions one-third of Evangelical churches compel their pastors to leave; one-fourth of pastors were once forced to exit; a tenth of

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20. Yew and Yau, *Managing Church Conflicts*, 4-5.

21. Yew and Yau, *Managing Church Conflicts*, 6.

22. Yew and Yau, *Managing Church Conflicts*, 9, 11.

23. Yew and Yau, *Managing Church Conflicts*, 48.

churches expelled more than three pastors.<sup>24</sup> This suggests the conflicts between pastor and church may occur as early as hiring. The authors recommend forming a pastoral search committee that includes mature lay leaders and, in some cases, seasoned pastors (e.g., a senior pastor). In real life, no matter how thorough the examination can be, conflicts may still develop between the governing board and the new pastor later. This is because the leaders are usually the most devoted ones in the church, having more expectations of and requests for the new pastor. As mentioned earlier, when differences of opinion and practice arise in the leadership team, including the pastor, tension and conflicts are usually unavoidable.

One of the expectations of Chinese pastors is their ability to grow the church. Chinese churches seem to be much anxious when it comes to church development and numerical growth. This also causes tension between the church and pastor when growth is slow, stagnant, or even declining. Yew and Yau rightly point out the church's common misunderstanding of growth and the possibility of conflict when the church evaluates the pastor's performance in this regard. The church has to discern that the pastor is merely one of the elements contributing to church growth. Besides pastoral ministry, spiritual growth depends on God's work and agenda, the seriousness or openness of seekers and believers, the church's obedience, unity, and the efficiency of the leadership, etc.<sup>25</sup> Influence outside the church should be, too, incorporated in a consideration of growth, such as the location of the church, any demographic changes in the Chinese population in

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24. Yew and Yau, *Managing Church Conflicts*, 38.

25. Yew and Yau, *Managing Church Conflicts*, 60.

the area, and acceptance of faith in local cultures.<sup>26</sup> Chinese churches should seek a more comprehensive understanding of church growth and the pastor's role in it so as to prevent unnecessary conflicts.

Another viewpoint with regard to preventing conflict is to figure out the seasons of the church. Different stages in church development, such as founding, growing, and established periods, require different styles of church ministry and leadership, because tension and conflicts may also evolve in times of such progression. For example, a given church might match with the dominant style of a pastor, but an established leadership team might demand democrat polity. Therefore, if a church and pastoral leadership cannot match with each other in different seasons, conflicts often occur.

In many aspects of tension, issues of power may be one of the most troublesome and damaging. Especially when it happens between the leaders and pastors, the church will struggle with maintaining order and unity. Yew and Yau believe there are some kinds of personalities who attempt to gain power, such as persons who sacrifice for the Lord but want to gain some sort of compensation from the church, persons who have less achievement outside but look for self-interest inside the church, persons who find nowhere but church for an opportunity at a power position, and persons who are used to being power players in and out of the church.<sup>27</sup> Once these kinds of persons gain power as leaders, there is a higher possibility of power abuse in the church. Unfortunately, sometimes these leaders are board members, usually having conflicts with the pastor when things are not going their way.

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26. Yew and Yau, *Managing Church Conflicts*, 60.

27. Yew and Yau, *Managing Church Conflicts*, 98, 99.

The book indicates some useful signs to detect power issues in the church, and suggests several methods to prevent power abuse and conflict, such as forming a special team for investigation and discipline.<sup>28</sup> For board members, they should create more opportunities to get to know each other so as to build up relationship and mutual trust. In practice, however, once a bias has mounted and has spread among leaders and pastors, they will have a difficult time resuming fellowship and cooperation without hesitation and doubt. In some situations, only enough time or a few special circumstances can clear an obscure issue and dissolve misunderstanding and mistrust. To solve conflicts and regain a healthier relationship for the involved persons or parties, church needs not only trusty methods but faith and patience.<sup>29</sup>

### **Business Culture and Church Development**

With the backdrop of Chinese church in Hong Kong, Paul Ma's *My Church is in Fact A Company* aims to understand the issue of business culture in Chinese churches. Smaller Chinese churches struggle to survive and to develop. Ma observes corporation culture actually dominates Chinese church ministry and development. Although a biblical church is not a company, the church is in fact registered as a non-profit company or organization in view of the government, enjoying tax exemption and other legal benefits. In addition, since the congregation comes from society, the church is inherent in business culture. The result is that the church follows secular enterprise, pursuing rapid membership and finance growth, church building expansion, and numerous programs and

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28. Yew and Yau, *Managing Church Conflicts*, 134ff.

29. Yew and Yau, *Managing Church Conflicts*, 181.

ministries.<sup>30</sup> Chinese churches are fascinated with various theories and methods of development and growth, such as Dr. Ralph Neighbor's cell groups church, Rick Warren's *The Purpose Driven Church*, Bill Hybels and Willow Creek Community Church in Illinois, and some other Christian leaders and mega churches in Singapore, South Korea, and Latin America.<sup>31</sup> Ma believes the power driving these church growth movements is enterprise culture.

There are built-in conflicts with the church acting as a company since church and company cultures are not compatible with one another. A church's character and purpose are different from a corporation's. Church is "the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church,"<sup>32</sup> while corporations are about business gain and development. The task of church is to witness Jesus Christ and make disciples who respond to their individual calling.<sup>33</sup> Nevertheless, most churches merely seek their own church development just like a corporation, and even idolize church growth.<sup>34</sup> Therefore, Ma rightly reminds his readers that, when engaging in ministry, the pastor and the church should be aware of such an inner contradiction of concepts of church and cooperation: conflicts often come from such an institutional contradiction when the pastor or leaders can't meet the expectation of numerical growth as a successful business.

Furthermore, in a business model, churches consider their pastor as a hired chief executive officer. The pastor is held accountable for church development and growth.

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30. Ma, *My Church is in Fact A Company*, 6, 7.

31. Ma, *My Church is in Fact A Company*, 12, 26-27.

32. Ma, *My Church is in Fact A Company*, 77, 96ff.

33. Ma, *My Church is in Fact A Company*, 66, 84, 126.

34. Ma, *My Church is in Fact A Company*, 87.

Meanwhile board members have the responsibility to oversee and evaluate the pastor's performance. For the pastor, this situation may also create a confusion of identity between God's servant and an occupational church employee. In reality, if pastors can't wrestle with the tension between the two identities they may be reluctant to respond to the board and the church and therefore bring up controversy and conflict. Comparatively speaking, if the board lacks respect for the pastor as a servant of the Lord, it may in other ways damage the relationship between pastor and church.

Is the church a company? The answer is yes and no. Pastors and churches need to understand the inherent and paradoxical tension between the biblical *ecclesia* and the business world.<sup>35</sup> Indeed, the gospel is not for sale, and the church—Chinese or English, large or small—in the United States, though registered under Internal Revenue Code ("IRC") section 501(c)(3) as a non-profit organization, is way beyond the definition of federal laws.<sup>36</sup> Although development is a life-and-death issue for small churches, overstating the case will result in misleading and losing the church's purpose and task.

## **Church Partnership**

Chris Bruno and Matt Dirks's *Churches Partnering Together: Biblical Strategies for Fellowship, Evangelism, and Compassion* advocates the necessity of partnership between smaller churches.<sup>37</sup> For the sake of the gospel, church partnership is happening across denominations and regions. The authors of the book identify such a partnership as

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35. Ma, *My Church is in Fact A Company*, 79-80.

36. Ma, *My Church is in Fact A Company*, 142.

37. Bruno and Dirks, *Churches Partnering Together*, 104.

Kingdom Partnership.<sup>38</sup> The associated churches will “pray, work, and share resources together strategically to glorify God” through advancing the kingdom of God.<sup>39</sup> It is not merely a pastoral fellowship, but surely local pastors’ prayer meetings or groups can initiate the partnership.<sup>40</sup> From a personal perspective, this writer is now experiencing the embodiment of church partnership. Since 2016 the author of this thesis-project has grouped some local pastors of Connecticut to develop a monthly gathering of pastoral fellowship. As the book suggests, in the beginning, three or four pastors in Connecticut agreed to meet once a month for prayer and fellowship.<sup>41</sup> Now more pastors or leaders are involved, including one driving three hours from New York, to participate in the monthly meeting. It is proven, therefore, that real-life church partnership can be done in a local sense where small churches are many and fellowship is crucial for survival and development.

Nevertheless, partnership is indeed an unnatural work.<sup>42</sup> It is intentional in the name of fellowship and unity.<sup>43</sup> The book offers Apostle Paul’s collection of offerings for the Jerusalem church as evidence that church partnership began in the early stages of the development of Christian churches in the first century. The theology of church partnership is hence rooted in rich biblical accounts. Therein Paul recruited these early churches around the Roman Empire to gather as partners for a common vision and goal to

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38. Bruno and Dirks, *Churches Partnering Together*, 18.

39. Bruno and Dirks, *Churches Partnering Together*, 18.

40. Bruno and Dirks, *Churches Partnering Together*, 20, 147.

41. Bruno and Dirks, *Churches Partnering Together*, 147.

42. Bruno and Dirks, *Churches Partnering Together*, 28.

43. Bruno and Dirks, *Churches Partnering Together*, 28.

assist the financial needs of the Jerusalem church. Bruno and Dirks offer Paul's collection ministry as a prototype of church partnership. Partnership is a channel to advance the kingdom through churches' mutual trust and love, and their physical service to one another. Churches today continue the pattern of biblical partnership. For example, in Phoenix, Arizona where more than fifty churches and 150 leaders are involved in a monthly pastor's seminar to train the next generation of church leaders.<sup>44</sup> Bruno and Dirks mention the Kairos Project, a network of churches in Southeast Asia doing church planting, as another good example of biblical kingdom partnerships.<sup>45</sup> A recent program for an opportunity of church partnership in Connecticut is also called Kairos.<sup>46</sup> A New York pastor introduced the program at one of the pastoral monthly meetings with a purpose to equip local churches for world mission through a course series. The pastor from New York testified how the course transformed his church from a lukewarm church to a church chiefly concerned with God's work in countries such as Peru, where the church had sent out mission teams in recent years. Through church partnership, small churches can begin to launch mission ministries not only by sending money but by sending trained co-laborers, a direct involvement of world mission.

New England Chinese churches do have the chance and need to develop partnerships. Bruno and Dirks remind their readers that partnership is feasible when churches find need, opportunity, and congruity.<sup>47</sup> As this author has observed, small

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44. Bruno and Dirks, *Churches Partnering Together*, 36.

45. Bruno and Dirks, *Churches Partnering Together*, 38.

46. Kairos, "Course Descriptions," accessed November 15, 2018,  
<https://www.kairoscourse.org/course-descriptions>.

47. Bruno and Dirks, *Churches Partnering Together*, 53ff.

churches with limited resources can easier detect the need of partnering with other churches. Nevertheless, not until an assignment requirement of the doctoral program did this author come up with an idea of calling local pastors for prayer together once a month. This has provided an opportunity for future pastoral fellowship and partnership in Connecticut. Pastors have agreed to hold regular meetings and now promote the Kairos course together.<sup>48</sup>

Church partnership, however, cannot come from a place of pressure and guilt.<sup>49</sup> In the author's case, the regular pastoral meeting is held by each involved pastor on a rotating basis. The host pastor calls for a meeting and invites the participants for lunch. Usually the host pastor pays for the meal. Does it become a burden for the participating pastors, since lunch seems necessary especially for people traveling longer distances? If pastors feel guilty not providing lunch, will they stop coming to the meeting? The book rightly reminds of the possibility of pressure and guilt in church partnership, whether the involved churches or pastors have a common goal to hold an evangelical event collectively or as simple as hosting a prayer meeting. With limited salary or resources, small church pastors may endure more pressure to commit to church partnerships.

While the book points out many facets of church partnerships, this author believes the theology of partnership can also apply within an individual church itself. Christian fellowship, or church, is a group of partners. The principles of partnering are embodied in the relationship between pastor and church, leaders and members, etc.

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48. The meeting usually starts at ten in the morning and ends at noon on one Monday of a month.

49. Bruno and Dirks, *Churches Partnering Together*, 118.

Partnership within a church goes through four stages of *forming*, *storming*, *norming*, and *performing*.<sup>50</sup> In the *forming* stage, pastor and church, for example, enjoy a honeymoon period. Just like church partners need to know each other to form a partnership, it is the best moment when new pastors get to know the church and become known by the congregation in the early stages of ministry. To prevent future conflicts, better understanding between one another will lay down a more solid foundation of future partnership between pastor and church.

The second stage of *storming* somehow becomes a stumbling block between pastor and church. When the honeymoon is over, real life begins. From theology to personal expectations, the pastor and core leaders find their difference in many aspects. Some board members start to question the pastor's leadership. Confrontations occur and embed potential conflicts. If problems can be solved, the church will go over the issues and move on to the third stage of *norming*. The board finally finds its way to work with the pastor and with one another. The working relationship is instituted and settled. The church even figures out its way to avoid or deal with conflicts between leaders or members. The ministry is getting shaped and ready to launch. Then, the *performing* stage comes in. The church develops in more efficient ways. New members come in. New core workers are added on. Needed families and individuals are satisfied. Ministries are multiplied.

Finally, it is crucial for leaders and the congregation to evaluate the four stages of the partnership within. In this way, the church can make adjustments accordingly and

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50. Bruno and Dirks, *Churches Partnering Together*, 94-95.

even *relaunch*, if necessary, so that the partnership can align with its original vision and goal, and stay the course.<sup>51</sup>

Whether within church or among churches, partnership is indeed essential to small church pastors and ministry. Whether big or small in size, churches should partner together to achieve the kingdom of God and fulfill the common missions with which the Lord has entrusted them. In the same way, partners within church, regardless of difference, ought to look for collaboration and unity, not confrontation and competition.

In practice, Bruno and Dirks cite Tim Keller as an example of how to embark on a movement of partnership with four characteristics: a clear and unifying vision, personal commitment and fulfillment, flexibility with participants, and spontaneity.<sup>52</sup> From personal experience, spontaneity can be the most fundamental factor for pastors in Connecticut to keep the momentum of partnership. For Chinese pastors and churches, it is burdensome sometimes to get involved in church partnership. Paul Ma observes very few pastors and leaders spend time and effort in partnering with other churches.<sup>53</sup> For example, with 80-100 churches in Eastern Kowloon, Hong Kong, only 10-20% of local churches participate in partnering networks. The reason for the low involvement is because the churches find these networks cost too much time and resources, and the participants don't see much benefit in return. In this viewpoint, it is more than precious to see that Connecticut small church pastors proactively meet together for fellowship and partnership for the past two years. Certainly all of the participants recognize their need to

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51. Bruno and Dirks, *Churches Partnering Together*, 95, 158.

52. Bruno and Dirks, *Churches Partnering Together*, 136-37.

53. Ma, *My Church is in Fact a Company*, 100-01.

pray and share, especially when church ministry becomes unbearable from time to time.

As Bruno and Dirks confirm, “This kind of committed fellowship can be a lifesaver.”<sup>54</sup>

Shepherding a small church is hard and lonely. Pastoral partnership keeps church leaders on track and provides encouragement to stay in the ministry as pastors resigning from church and leaving ministry becomes a new norm in New England. For those choosing to stay, the book encourages with this story: when a mission to Quebec, Canada, stood still for Tom Carson and his partners, they were questioned why not just to quit and leave.

Carson replied, “I stay because I believe God has many people in this place.”<sup>55</sup> Small church ministry is certainly a serious calling. Apostle Paul, too, was once called to carry on a mission when a fruitless outcome seemed inevitable: “One night the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision: ‘Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you, because I have many people in this city.’ So Paul stayed in Corinth for a year and a half, teaching them the word of God” (Acts 18: 9-11). To many Chinese small churches and pastors, partnership will help them respond faithfully to the Lord’s calling.

## Summary

The four books mentioned in this chapter contribute to this thesis-project by providing a landscape of what small Chinese immigrant churches may look like before further exploration. They depict the characteristics of the church through its pastoral leadership and theology, specific concerns of church development or obstacles, and a

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54. Bruno and Dirks, *Churches Partnering Together*, 104.

55. Bruno and Dirks, *Churches Partnering Together*, 84.

practical need of church-wide partnership. First of all, instead of rapid numerical growth, small churches should aim to transform the people of God toward a Christ-centered life. The church, therefore, should develop certain strategies to achieve the goal without being misled by a worldly business culture and methodology. Although the church is a tax-exempt entity by governmental definition, its inherently spiritual aspect not only is undeniable but requires biblical governing and development. Secondly, Chinese churches need to confront its great concern of relational conflict. Therein the power issues of the leadership can seriously hinder the progress and unity of the church. Pastors and leaders need to be efficient in their prevention of struggles, or seek for resolution before a situation worsens and affects the whole congregation in a harmful way. Finally, because of the limitation of resources and opportunities for small churches, they should come together as partners to help one another in ministry. It is a biblical practice rooted in the early churches that exemplifies how churches worked together regardless of ethnic or regional differences. For the sake of God's kingdom, small churches should learn to partner with one another for sharing resources, burdens, and tasks in order to respond collaboratively to God's calling. Consequently, the above review of these books offer some basic guidelines for this research.

## CHAPTER 4

### PROJECT DESIGN

This thesis-project was carried out as a series of semi-structured interviews with local pastors during a period of seven months. Each interview included two hours of conversation. Since the year of 2016, the author has been asked to be the moderator of the monthly pastoral partnership gatherings spoken of in the previous chapter, because the author started the meeting two years ago. The interviews are therefore an extension of the monthly pastoral meeting. As interviewer, the author hopes to see how small Chinese church pastors respond to their current ministry issues and crises.

The author started the interviews by inviting pastors to join the project as interviewees. Participating pastors agreed to take part in the interview by signing an informed consent document (Appendix A). They gathered as a focus group and included pastors from Chinese Baptist Church of Greater Hartford (CBCGH), Danbury Chinese Alliance Church (DCAC), Grace Baptist Church (GBC), Norwich Chinese Christian Church (NCCC), and New Haven Chinese Alliance Church (NHCAC). Some other local pastors also join the monthly gathering from time to time. They are pastors or leaders from Ambassador of Christ, Calvary Baptist Church (CBCNH), International Church at Yale, and Rockland Chinese Alliance Church, New York.

The interview was centered on topics of concern to small Chinese churches and their pastors, namely their struggles to survive and develop. The questions required the interviewees to share how they respond to the status quo and how their pastoral leadership interacts with it. In the interview session, the interviewer observed the

participants generally through three perspectives. First, what are the issues the pastors engage in? Secondly, how do the pastors react? Thirdly, do they propose feasible solutions?

The interview was conducted in a free dialogue style. The interviewer led the conversation initially, and then let it flow. The focus group was expected to respond proactively. During the conversation the interviewer summarized the respondents' discourse. In the last interview, there was a questionnaire for each respondent. Therefore, the research was done in two sessions: Session A – The Interview, and Session B – The Questionnaire. With this intentional design, a feedback loop was constructed for a more comprehensive survey.

## **Session A**

### Pastoral Interview #1

In the first interview, the author invited the participants to discuss what topic or topics concern their pastoral and church ministries. Besides the author, three pastors attended. The author explained the purpose of the interview and asked them to consider signing the informed consent document. The three pastors agreed and signed. They formed a focus group. The meeting was held at Grace Baptist Church (GBC).

The conversation began with recent church issues. CBCGH just finished their church's building project. After a decade of debate and search for new church building, the church finally closed on the purchase of a Jewish Synagogue. Yet there was a long-term struggle during the process. The crisis was because of divided opinions from church subgroups. Originally the church bought land, but the congregation found it too

expensive to continue the project. The land eventually sold. Many years later, the project resumed after the church eventually discovered an affordable facility. The new building only needed partial remodeling, but it was basically workable. While most of the congregation agreed to the purchase, however, a few people were reluctant since it would cause extra traveling time. The pastor explained a new building was needed because the church had been renting a church property for the past forty years. The church was eager to have its own building.

The other two pastors shared the problems of renting local church properties for their own church gatherings. One pastor mentioned his congregation has been renting a historic church building since the 1990s; the host church now requires the Chinese tenant to share in the financial burden of maintaining the building. At the same time, the other pastor complained of the high price of their lease payment.

The conversation turned to church finance. Two churches had limited financial offering or no tithing. One of the churches now needed to cut the budget drastically and the church reduced the pastor's benefits accordingly.

Pastors talked about recent security issues. Because of the Texas Church Shooting on November 5, 2017, the churches now had real concerns about gun violence and church safety.<sup>1</sup> One of the pastors explained how his church addressed the issue in their board meeting and their corresponding action plan. In this regard, a pastor shared his experience of dealing with autism patients during church services. Not coincidentally all of the pastors did share similar experience in ministering to autistic attendees who often cause

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1. Daniella Silva, Rima Abdelkader, Pete Williams and Phil McCausland, "Texas Church Shooting: More Than Two Dozen Parishioners Killed," NBCNews, November , 2017, accessed November 15, 2018, <https://www.nbcnews.com/storyline/texas-church-shooting/several-casualties-reported-texas-church-shooting-n817751>.

safety concerns. Meanwhile, two of the pastors mentioned some domestic violence cases from their congregations. One of them pointed out the victim was reluctant to seek a support system such as shelter service. Such an abusive case is not uncommon in the immigrant community.

Along with the security issue, pastors addressed cases of depression, including their own and their wives'. Some pastors found their wives constantly suffering from symptoms of depression. Among these pastoral couples the depressive thoughts were generally from ministry, especially the relationship with lay leaders. Two pastors had intensive struggle with lay leaders. One of them served in church ministry for one and a half years; the other, two and a half. Both pastors worried about their interaction with the core volunteers. Respectively they recalled their churches' stories about relational conflicts among leaders. Some issues were regarding theological differences; others originated in personality and character differences. In response, pastors hoped to pray for their relationships with leaders, especially for the ones they have trouble dealing with.

In the last parts of the interview, the interviewer asked whether the pastors would share their recent ministerial goals or action items regarding church development. GBC was planning to hold an Evangelical rally in the next month. Further, CBCGH and NCCC would participate in an upcoming youth camp in the New England area—an Evangelical event targeting Chinese students. Finally, two pastors talked about a possible opportunity for their churches to participate in translating an English discipleship course into Chinese.

## Pastoral Interview #2

The second interview started with two topics: how to enhance church prayer meetings and how to build a leadership team. These questions were follow-up concerns after praying for the relationship between pastors and their leaders. The focus group were all in attendance. This time a minister from a local campus ministry of CBCNH joined the discussion panel as well.

Pastors, one by one, shared the current conditions of prayer meetings in their churches. All of the five leaders admitted the poor situation of low attendance in prayer meetings. One of the churches even stopped holding prayer meetings for some time. Among the five churches, regular attendance of prayer meetings was from three to ten. Compared to Sunday services, however, the churches' average attendance was thirty to 150 people. Accordingly, the pastors worried about the huge gap of attendance between Sunday services and weekly prayer meetings.

The conversation turned to reasons for low or non-attendance of church prayer meetings. At NCCC, there were power struggles taking place within the leadership team, causing division and creating a stumbling block for prayer. That month a serious dispute had occurred in their board meeting. Another factor was due to recent big job cuts from Pfizer Co., affecting one-third of the manpower of the church. Since then, the morale in the church had been low. At NHCAC, lay leaders were reluctant to follow the pastor's leadership in board meetings. Issue surrounding power also occurred in the campus ministry of CBCNH. One of the members did not cooperate with the pastor and refused to join the board meeting due to his own personal agenda. At GBC, personal agendas taking precedence over prayer meetings led to a lack of motivation to join prayer

meetings. Pastors all shared various issues of concern they felt confined the willingness of members of their congregations to attend prayer meetings.

In response, pastors proposed several solutions, such as issuing a weekly prayer letter via email, encouraging fifteen minutes of prayer during small group gatherings, and recommending new approaches to prayer.<sup>2</sup> One pastor would encourage the church to form prayer groups through social media, such as “WeChat”. That pastor also would hold a prayer meeting before or after Sunday service. At NHCAC, instead of weekday prayer meetings, the church now held the prayer meeting on the weekend, which had been attracting more attendance lately. This month the church also engaged in a 40-day consecutive fasting prayer program at 7 a.m. Meanwhile, the GBC deacon board decided to hold a new monthly Deacon Prayer Meeting at church. Pastors and churches were proactively facing the challenges of prayer meeting attendance.

Further, in response to leadership issues, pastors all agreed to spend time building up their relationships with co-laborers, especially with problematic ones. To maintain unity, pastors and co-laborers would wait for one another to reach a consensus – they should slow down. At the same time, pastors should learn not to take all co-laborers’ negative feedback personally. One of the pastors then addressed a mental health issue with a core worker. He also observed that Chinese culture was involved in church life; a “Culture Revolution” way of working—a philosophy that was drastically impolite, confrontational, and judgmental, was taking a part in the ministry. These mental and cultural concerns therefore made leadership issues even more complicated.

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2. “ACTS” prayer model. Cf. “How Do I Pray?”, accessed November 15, 2018, <http://hopeinthecity.org/hope/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/ACTS-Prayer-Guide.pdf>.

### Pastoral Interview #3

The participants of this interview were pastors of GBC, NCCC, and NHCAC. The interview basically followed up on issues pastors had shared last time.

NCCC was dedicated to the reorganization of their leadership team; the original team had not met for months. The regrouping was needed due to three reasons. First, the leaders often lacked consensus; they even disagreed with some basic practices, such as baptism. Secondly, the church morale was low due to the loss of one-third of the manpower in the last year. Owing to such a huge impact, the church would need to regroup and rearrange church ministry. The pastor also proposed an annual theme, “A Church after God’s Heart,” boosting morale and church unity. Thirdly, the pastor would start discipleship programs to overcome cultural barriers and to improve commitment. For a long time, NCCC had been confronted with cultural challenges from the immigrant community. Near major casinos in the state, the Chinese community was secular and resistant to Christianity. Such a community culture also had a negative impact on the church’s life. The attendees were reluctant to be committed to the Lord and ministry. The proposed discipleship programs might pave the way for rebuilding the leadership.

Furthermore, last month NCCC leaders agreed with the pastor to enhance internal partnership. The leaders would give the pastor some time to adjust internal structure of the church. They wanted to reboot the board and prayer meetings. In addition, they wanted to have more informal activities, such as picnics with families, to get to know one another better. Their target was to restore the leadership team in a year. The pastor was pleased to see during the month a new member was willing to participate in leadership. Accordingly, if the leadership was reformed and began to grow, the pastor hoped the

church might constitute eldership someday. In short, NCCC leadership gained some progress.

NHCAC's pastor reflected on their recent prayer meetings. He gave thanks to God for the success of the 40 days of consecutive fasting prayer meetings at the church. God did answer the church's prayer request for an English children worker – a Yale professor agreed to join the teaching team. During the program, the pastor himself was encouraged to rely more on God's power. Although not everyone participated in the morning prayer meetings, the pastor posted the prayer item in the church's WeChat group daily. By doing so, he believed more people might pray with the church during the day. He could sense the church's desire for God's presence. He even shared some issues with co-laborers during the meetings. He also hoped to hold another round of consecutive fasting prayers before Good Friday.

Nevertheless, the prayer program at NHCAC continued to struggle from old problems. The pastor believed some lay leaders were absent in the prayer meetings due to the culture of intellectuals.<sup>3</sup> Their philosophy was actually hindering the progress of faith. These co-laborers often governed the church as a corporation. For other absent members, the pastor met them individually. He discovered the leaders' disagreement in ideology and church government was hindering the church's prayer meetings. Some people stopped coming because of feeling hurt from such divisions. Others simply felt discontent with the prayer meetings. The pastor found that the co-laborers' personalities and their tendency toward sense or sensibility may greatly affect their willingness to attend the meetings.

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3. In NHCAC, the core volunteers mostly hold a Ph.D. degree.

## Pastoral Interview #4

In previous conversations the dominating topic concerned the relationships between leaders in the church. Therefore, this time the interviewer decided to focus on teamwork. The interview started with the introduction of a new pastor from Danbury Chinese Alliance Church (DCAC).<sup>4</sup>

DCAC had some sort of long-term tensions among the congregation. The core volunteers expected the new pastor to dissolve the conflicts in a short time. The pastor hoped not to take sides but only to express his personal concerns on the matters. As a new pastor, he did not expect that the leaders would easily follow his advice. Under such a climate he believed his honeymoon period with the church might be cut short.

The pastor from NHCAC responded to the concerns of the DCAC pastor. He believed the most serious problem in his church was teamwork. Although the leadership team was full of potential, leaders were often insistent with their personal opinions and wanted others to follow. Further, while some leaders complained of too much workload, others felt unwanted in their offers of service. These leaders then chose to reserve their time and talents. Another concern was the quick turnover rate of church visitors. The church was now eager to know how to make people stay with the church—"close the back door," so to speak.

The day prior to this interview, NCCC successfully held a congregational meeting. Members reached consensus on their faith statement: pursue unity and love one another. Although the leaders were usually self-minded, they would like to lay aside what they had been insisting on. The other issue was the job uncertainty of the core volunteers

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4. The brother is studying in the seminary. He joined the interview by signing the informed consent document.

from Pfizer, Inc. Just in the beginning of the year the company started a new run of mass layoffs. This routine of job cutting seriously impacted the leadership team. Nevertheless, there was a big company, Electric Boat, moving into town, which was expected to bring more jobs in the area.<sup>5</sup>

On the topic of teamwork, CBCGH's pastor informed the group that before he was called into full-time pastoral ministry he had worked with the church leadership for more than 10 years. As long time co-laborers they knew each other well. There seemed to be no conflicts in the leadership up to that point. Nevertheless, recently the pastor encountered a struggle between the Chinese leaders and an English pastor of the church. This Caucasian pastor had been reluctant to hire a youth pastor as an assistant to the ministry. Since the majority of the youth were Chinese Americans, the parents asked the leadership to hire an Asian American minister. The leadership responded agreeably, but the English pastor was opposed. The Chinese pastor believed because the English co-laborers were younger adults without teenage children they didn't feel an urgency to cultivate the Asian Christian youth. The reluctance of the English pastor caused disagreement between the Chinese and English co-laborers.

#### Pastoral Interview #5

The interviewer began with questions of cultural and doctrinal differences in the church: for example, does the church require baptism for the participants in the Lord's Supper?

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5. Stephen Singer, "Connecticut, Electric Boat OK \$85M Deal For Expansion To Support 1,900 New Jobs," May 1, 2018, accessed November 15, 2018, <http://www.courant.com/business/hc-biz-electric-boat-jobs-20180501-story.html>.

Pastors agreed it is Chinese Christians' tradition to ask for baptism as a criterion for partaking in Communion. The church leaders would insist such a tradition at any rate. They believed most Chinese churches followed the tradition. For example, at NHCAC, before the ceremony the pastor usually reminds the congregation that if they have not yet been baptized they should not partake. Yet he would welcome such attendees to observe. At CBCGH, however, Chinese and English ministries had different understanding and practices. The Chinese service carried on the tradition, only allowing baptized Christians to participate in Communion; at the same time, the English service welcomed all believers. Because of such a division, up to this point the church has never held a unified Communion service for both the Chinese and English congregations. Similarly, at GBC, having both Chinese and English congregations, the church takes an ambiguous position on the matter—it depends on which pastor, Chinese or English, holds the ceremony in the monthly combined service.

The interviewer then turned to the role of the church: is it a worship center or an ethnic community center? The topic focused on the tension between Christianity and Chinese culture. Church leaders might have differing views of the church's main role, especially during special seasons. Last Christmas, for example, NCCC leaders argued over how to celebrate Christmas – some desired to sing some Christmas pop songs during Sunday service, while others opposed the idea. The former aimed to attract more first-time visitors by singing familiar Christmas songs – they wanted the service to feel like home to newcomers. The latter objected because they believe the Christmas celebration is a worship service, and it is not for entertainment. A compromised solution was that the church arranged those less religious programs to take place immediately after the formal

celebration service had ended. The pastor, however, hoped the lay leaders would be more open-minded for the sake of attracting visitors. He thought it was unnecessary to be so religious, especially at some ethnic events such as Chinese New Year.

On the topic of Chinese New Year celebrations in the church, NHCAC has a long-time policy of disapproval of any program simply out of personal interest or strong performance wish—the church believes the stage of the sanctuary is the most holy place where God is present in the service. For this reason, any performance or program should be religious and worshipful even in times of celebrating Chinese New Year. The church restricted the use of any Chinese religious symbols, such as a Chinese dragon. The pastor himself was against the idea of a Chinese dragon. He came from an underground church where the church treated the symbol of the Chinese dragon as an idol. The leaders had mutual understanding with him on this topic.

While NHCAC was hostile to the idea of a Chinese dragon in church, CBCGH held an opposite perspective. During the Chinese New Year celebration the church would arrange mostly ethnic programs. For example, a sister who operated a martial arts studio usually provided Dragon Dance in one of the programs. In this year's event, however, a church member raised concerns about the Chinese dragon. At the same time, another sister who practiced Qigong also protested dragon dance, because she was afraid of being involved in any “unholy activity.” The pastor’s response was to explain the difference between the dragon in the Bible and the Chinese dragon, and assured her that next year the church may consider canceling the program because of the concerns. Yet personally the pastor believed some Chinese programs, such as folk music or dragon dance, should be allowed in the celebration—it is not necessary to be religious for such a

festival, since the purpose of the event is to draw visitors from the community. In practice, every year the celebration indeed drew many Chinese residents and students in the area.

An incident went a different direction at DCAC. In the church's recent celebration a core leader insisted there should be a "Bible riddles" program. While Chinese Riddles could be one of the traditions to celebrate New Year, such an insistence had made other co-laborers complain that those Bible riddles were not only too difficult to solve but not friendly enough for the visitors.

In the end of the interview, pastors concluded that the immigrant church could have a double identity – house of worship" and ethnic community center.<sup>6</sup> Yet sometimes such a character can create inner conflict, especially in serving the community. The Chinese church needs to decide which identity is more foundational. Further, although the church plays a crucial role in the community, the identity of "house of worship" should be top priority. After years of practice, GBC, for example, had been learning to discern such a double identity and adjust its ministries accordingly, especially regarding ethnic events. GBC's Chinese Festival usually combines Christian and Chinese ideas. For example, the pastor once preached on the Bronze Snake in the Book of Numbers (21:4-8) in his opening speech in the Year of the Snake. Chinese churches' twofold identity makes church life unique and yet complicated sometimes.

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6. The phrase "house of worship" is borrowed from Michael Foley and Dean Hoge, *Religion and the New Immigrants* (New York, NY: Oxford, 2007).

## Pastoral Interview #6

The interview started with political issues relating to Chinese churches. For example, after “The Nineteenth National Congress of the Communist Party of China,” the Chinese government’s new religious policy began to throw impact on Chinese scholars and students abroad.<sup>7</sup> Lately, some churches, such as NHCAC, near major colleges in the United States, had found Chinese visiting scholars becoming absent in the church’s public activities. As far as it is understood, before leaving China, these scholars received warnings from the government prohibiting them from participating in any church-related activity overseas. The Communist Party apparently began tightening the “thought grip” recently. Instead of offering public invitations, the Chinese church needed to look for alternative approaches for campus ministry. The pastor of NHCAC, for instance, now welcomed the scholars to visit his own home for Christian gatherings. Yet even so, only few people dared to take part. Such a development revealed that Chinese politics was affecting the people abroad, though far away from the homeland.

The other part of the conversation came to leadership. NHCAC’s pastor just lost a close friend and leader last month. The co-laborer left the church suddenly without warning. The pastor was saddened because the worker had never mentioned leaving before. The reason might be relational conflicts between the leader and other co-laborers.

At CBCGH, the Mandarin pastor suffered from tense relations with both English and Cantonese co-laborers. English leaders rejected following a new Sunday schedule with the Mandarin and Cantonese services, which started simultaneously at 10 a.m. Since the church had moved to the new building, the leader board decided all Sunday services

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7. The congressional meeting was held in Beijing, October 18-24, 2017.

should begin at same time. The decision would help the parents who often join the Mandarin or Cantonese service to send their children to the English service at the same time. Now the English leaders claimed that owing to the recent tardiness of the children the service would postpone to 11 a.m. In a way this proposed time for the English service could affect families with members of different ages or languages. For such a proposal, the Mandarin pastor, unfortunately, had an argument with the English pastor.

Meanwhile, the Mandarin pastor and leaders had a strong disagreement with the Cantonese congregation, since the leadership refused a Cantonese pastoral candidate. For years the congregation looked for a new pastor. Under church policy, however, any hiring required agreement among the leadership of the three language groups. Now when the Mandarin leaders were the only leaders disapproving of the candidate, it unavoidably resulted in conflict, especially with the Cantonese group. Unfortunately, regardless of the opposition, the Cantonese continued the hiring procedure, which worsened the relationship even further. To a point, the Mandarin pastor even sensed enmity from the Cantonese. Eventually, for the sake of peace and harmony, the pastor went to the Cantonese group for explanation and reconciliation. In the middle of this turmoil, the pastor of CBCGH was frustrated. He even considered resigning. But after serious heart-searching, he still felt called to stay the course.

Last month NCCC regrouped their leadership team. The new board would conduct a church-wide survey to determine whether to ordain the pastor. Now the pastor had finished all the ordination requirements from the denomination. If the church and the denomination would agree with each other, the pastor could be ordained in June 2018. The pastor was thrilled that the new leadership was established, because a troublemaker

eventually withdrew from the board. It was the first time that co-laborers had a peaceful conversation in the board meeting. For such harmony, the pastor and leaders were both moved to tears.

Yet a malicious complaint against the pastor's wife suddenly attacked the couple behind their backs. The pastor believed it was because of his wife's introversion that she became the target. Now while the wife was in her eighth month of pregnancy, the pastor asked for the church not to assign any duties upon his wife. Pleasingly, the leadership granted his request unanimously.

In the last part of the interview, pastors directed their attention to the introduction of Kairos Course. A New York pastor testified how the ministry transformed their congregation from inner conflict to mission focus. The leaders and members no longer critically examined the pastor and his ministry. The church now devoted itself to mission, such as organizing work teams to visit Chinese residents and students in Europe. After the testimony, pastors decided to develop an action plan, which was to introduce the Kairos ministry to their churches. They also planned a possible time to embark on the ministry—it would be a series of intensive courses for two consecutive weekends in September 2018. Finally, CBCGH volunteered to commence the lectures.

#### Pastoral Interview #7

In the final interview session, pastors were asked to participate in feedback regarding the previous gatherings/interviews. But before the sharing began, the pastor of NCCC proposed an urgent prayer request—his ordination would be postponed one year. The leadership believed there were some issues concerning the pastor's character. During

the year, the leaders observed his attitude had been somehow “unteachable.” They thought the pastor needed to take responsibility for a serious conflict with one of the core volunteers. Although that leader had withdrawn from the board, the pastor was held accountable for his failure to relieve the tension.

Following up with the leadership issue, the pastor of GBC shared his experience during a job interview at a Chinese church in El Paso, Texas. The pastor passed the examination and was invited to come serve the church. But when he got back home several days later, a call came from another lay leaders who was requesting a second interview. This leader claimed the church’s hiring was unlawful, since he could not be involved in decision-making while traveling. It appeared to the pastor there was some degree of power struggles within that church even before his possible ministry began. He then replied to decline the second interview. The pastor concluded that if one of the leaders overpowers the others, it can be difficult for a pastor to work with such a leader in the future.

The pastor of NHCAC reflected that in his recent board meetings he could sense a confrontational atmosphere. The criticism of the pastor was a bit harsh. He observed that sometimes after the meeting, co-laborers who talked inappropriately would come to him privately for apology. He felt this kind of behavior—to humiliate someone publicly but apologize secretly—was unacceptable. The pastor thought it was proof that ruthless business culture often sneaked into the church leadership. Accordingly, to prevent it from deteriorating the relationship, the pastor and leaders learned to converse in an encouraging spirit. Instead of endless criticism, the leaders agreed to be more positive

with one another so that the board meetings and the church culture might be more encouraging in the future.

The conversation then turned to cultural differences. Pastors agreed the western culture could be more positive and encouraging. Western culture would separate business from personal; the Eastern culture would mingle the two. The drawback of Chinese culture might be to take things too personally. Especially in a meeting context, such a cultural influence usually played a major role in confrontations.

In the closing time, the interviewer invited the participants to give feedback on the pastoral gatherings so far and what they would expect from future conversations. In response, all of the attendees were appreciative that there was an occasion for pastors to share freely. Pastors admitted many topics were too sensitive to mention at the church. They were pleased to have this unique opportunity for pastors in Connecticut to get together for pastoral fellowship. As for suggested topics, one pastor thought the discussion better when it remained in an open-ended format. He believed it was unnecessary to reach conclusions on certain issues. At the same time, other pastors recommended topics such as: how to motivate more members to join ministries, how to make teamwork work, and how to manage ministries. In short, pastors would welcome conversations related to development and leadership.

Other themes of interest included topics relating to spiritual formation and growth, which is, the pastors all agreed with, the foundation of a good leadership team. Along that thought, pastors needed to consider how to manage efficiently their limited resources for cultivating church character. Further, some churches were close to colleges

where pastors would develop campus ministry even though the churches were short of manpower.

Other topics the pastors were interested in exploring related to special pastoral care. In a secular society, marital issues, such as divorce, remarriage, domestic violence, de facto relationships, etc., have become challenging for the church. For example, should the pastor or church officiate remarriage under certain conditions? Should the church permit Christians committed to cohabitation to partake in Communion? Questions like these really hit a nerve in pastoral ministry. Besides, pastors sometimes face life issues from the congregation, such as addictions, gambling, problematic habits, or mental diseases. Especially regarding mental problems, Chinese often feel reluctant to cry for help due to shame culture. Pastors needed to discern these issues in time and respond correctly. These particular issues draw great attention from the pastors.

## **Session B**

### The Questionnaire

This author designed a poll (Appendix B), consisting of twelve questions related to the topics discussed in the interviews. The respondents included the pastors of CBCGH, DCAC, GBC, NCCC, and NHCAC. The interviewer sent out the questionnaire to each of the participants, and required their response within a week. Conclusively, all of the respondents sent back the results to the interviewer in the proposed time frame.

## CHAPTER 5

### OUTCOMES

The purpose of this thesis-project was to understand what small Chinese churches in New England area really concerned about regarding their survival and development during a downturn of the economy and the displacement of Chinese immigrants. This author hoped to know, in such a season of dramatic changes, what affects pastors' daily ministry in a small church context in Connecticut. Further, this writer hoped to create a free forum, through the interview method of research, for pastors to be able to seize this opportunity to build up a pastoral fellowship and ministerial partnership.

But what pleased the author was the enthusiasm the participants showed during the interviews. Pastors were not only cooperative but yearning for conversation and sharing. As interviewer, this author was supposed to guide the topics and direct the dialogue, but in fact the interviewees often either shared proactively or even took over the issues spontaneously. Pastors indeed had a lot to talk about. Actually, their free and heartfelt discourse propelled and enriched these conversational interviews simply beyond expectation.

One of the reasons for such an upbeat attitude of the interviewees was based on mutual trust which was built from previous monthly pastoral gatherings. As mentioned, the interviews were in fact an extension of that series of meetings. The author took advantage of established times of pastoral fellowship for further exploration. This environment of fellowship indeed benefited the research in many respects. First of all, participants felt safe to speak up. Secondly, the limited direction required from the

interviewer created more space for reflection and sharing, which often opened up deeper exchanges in the meeting. Thirdly, the more conversations took place, the more unified the pastors' fellowship became. Mutual understanding nurtured friendship. The author himself was one of the beneficiaries of new friendships made with pastors through the process. For about ten years, the author was the sole Chinese pastor in the area. Maybe out of their common need for the friendship of fellow pastors the interviewer and interviewees alike made the meetings a high priority even in the midst of their busy schedules.

The drawbacks of these open-ended interviews, however, were a loose structure of conversation. It sounds contradictory. The benefit of the semi-constructed interviews paradoxically brought up uncertainty during the conversation. The designed topics became secondary matters. If the interviewer could not discern in time, the sharing could lead to wandering. Accordingly, if the interviewer handled the interaction in a more dominant way, the interviews could have been more focused and ordered. For example, during the interviews it was not unusual for one or two respondents to occupy a greater amount of time with their sharing; their disclosures were sometimes off topic. While the main idea behind the open interviews anticipated and embraced such a distraction, to some degree the interviewer risked losing control of the topics, and the talks could be aimless. After one of the interviews a participant privately suggested that the conversation be more topic-centered. He was afraid of wasting time listening to pastors' complain about their jobs. Therein the author admitted a lack of experience in leading such a less directed conversation, which sometimes led to a lack of concentration.

Although the interviews were done in a rather relaxing way, the result was powerful. Below is the result of the feedback questionnaire which shows the participants seriously committed to the interview project by clearly answering the questionnaire. Mostly their response was consistent with what they had shared in the interviews. As interviewees, their sincerity and openness made the poll researchable.

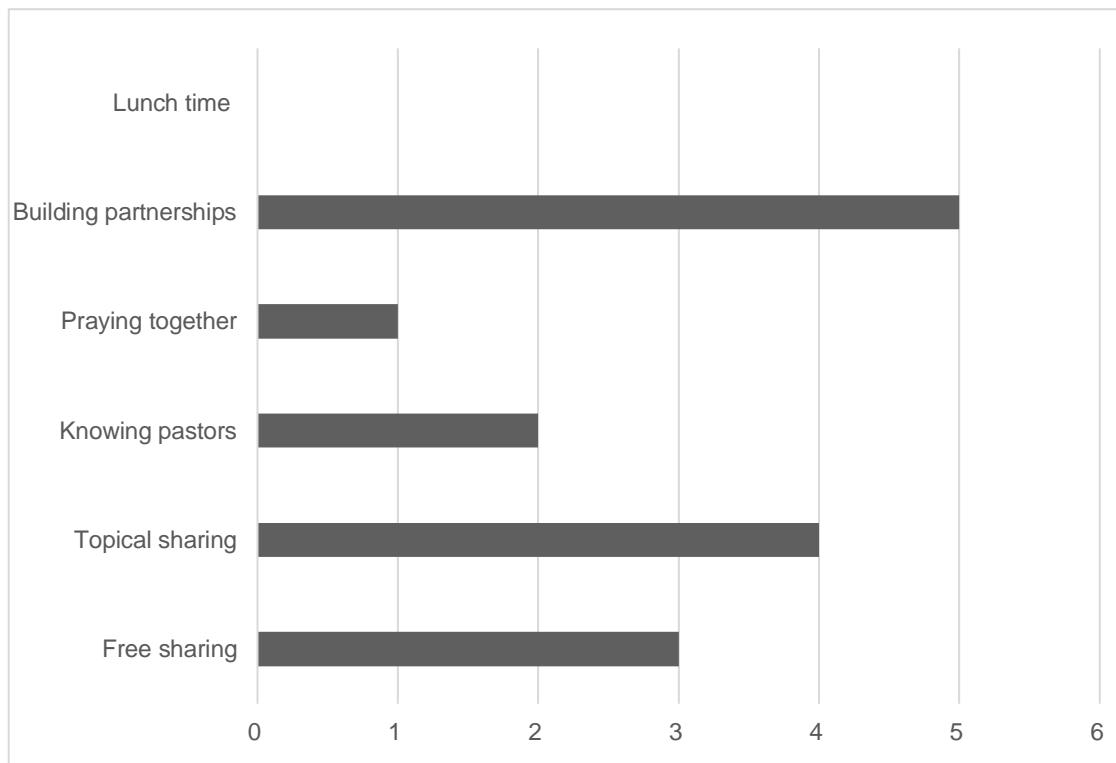


Table 1. Question #1: “What benefited you most in the pastoral meetings/interviews?”

Among 5 options, interviewees chose mostly “building partnerships” (5 scores). “Lunch time” had the fewest votes with zero. The second highest score was “topical sharing” (4 scores). It appears that pastors expected to partner with one another for ministerial purposes. One of the examples was collectively introducing the Kairos Course

to churches.<sup>1</sup> Pastors shared about their ministerial challenges regularly, showing their need to seek understanding, suggestions, and support.

Pastors also preferred topical to random conversation. Although “free sharing” scored third, pastors wished the talks had been more directed. During interviews, however, the respondents did not officially raise such a concern.

As for the least scored, “lunch time” (0 scores), it indicates the pastors were in favor of formal conversation during interviews, rather than casual talk around the table. Nevertheless, it did not mean the participants stopped the dialogue during lunch time. In fact, as observed, the fellowship of pastors continued to grow on such occasions. More personal issues, such as diet habits and health, were discussed. Lunchtime conversation therefore enhanced the closeness of the friendships.

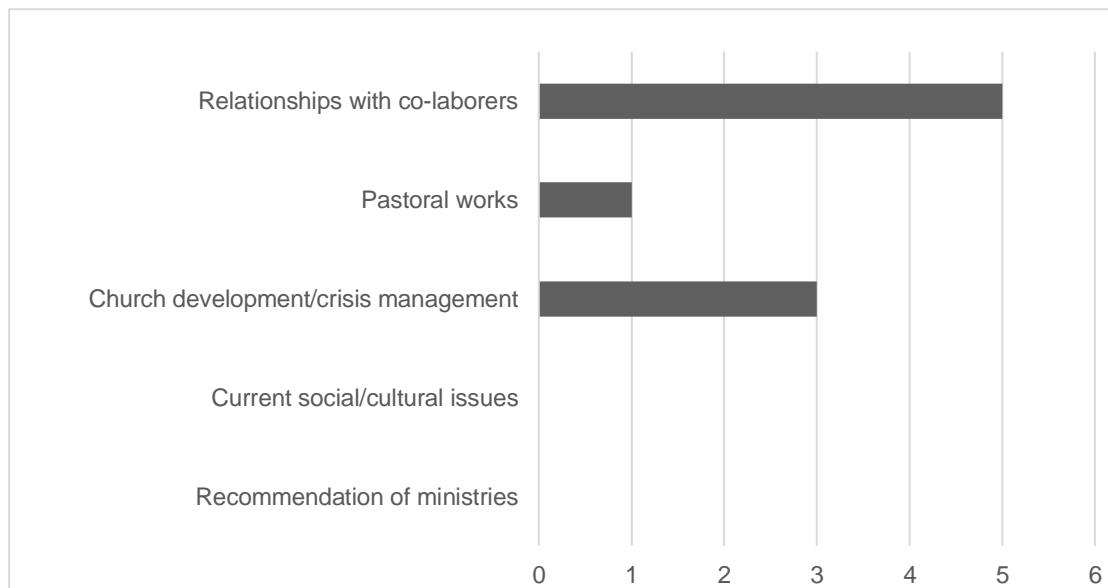


Table 2. Question #2: “Among the topics covered in the pastoral meetings/interviews, which benefited you most?”

1. See Chapter 4.

Pastors most benefited from interviews related to the topic of “relationships with co-laborers” (5 scores). On the other hand, two items scored 0 (“current social/cultural issues” and “recommendation of ministries”). The second highest score went to “church development/crisis management” (3 scores). Concerning the two topics with higher scores, one can see the respondents wanting to understand the status quo. During the interviews, the majority of the issues discussed related to relationships with leaders and church development/crisis. Frequently the participants spontaneously shared their own experience of these two topics during interviews. It seems that in smaller churches issues regarding relationships and development/survival demand answers in this regard.



Table 3. Question #3: “In the past three years, what magnitude was the challenge of ‘relationships with co-laborers’?” (choose one description)

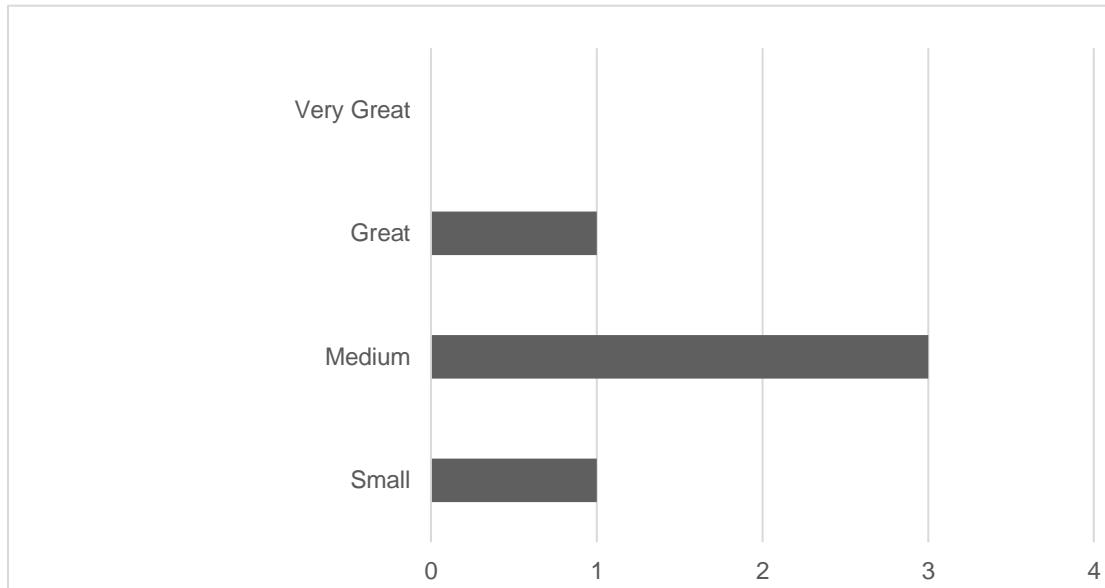


Table 4. Question #4: “Currently, what magnitude is the challenge of ‘relationships with co-laborers’?” (choose one description)

Questions #3 and #4 were combined as a series. Pastors admitted co-laborer relationships challenged their ministry now and then. No matter how huge the crisis could be, it was an ongoing issue.

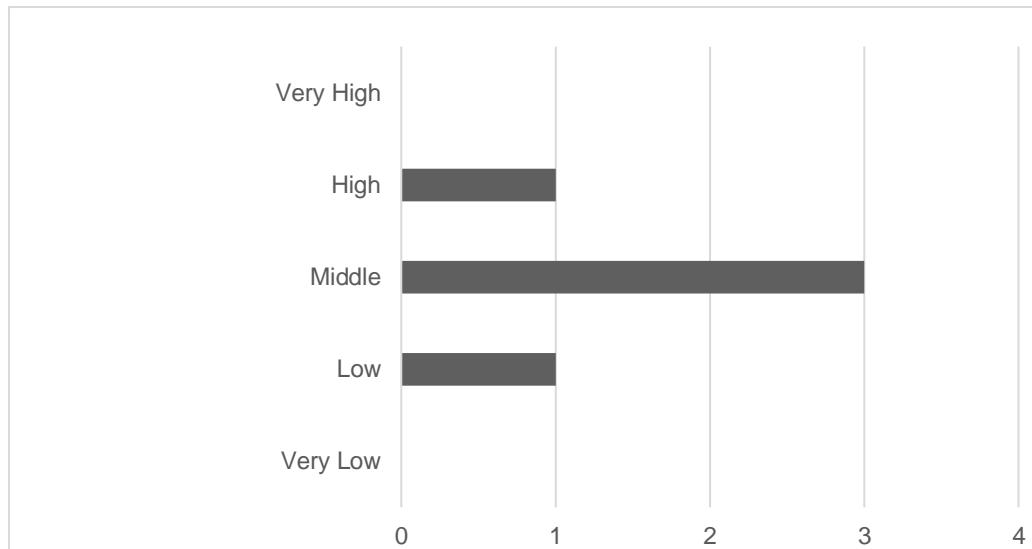


Table 5. Question #5: “In the past three years, to what degree has the challenge of ‘relationships with co-laborers’ improved?” (choose one description)

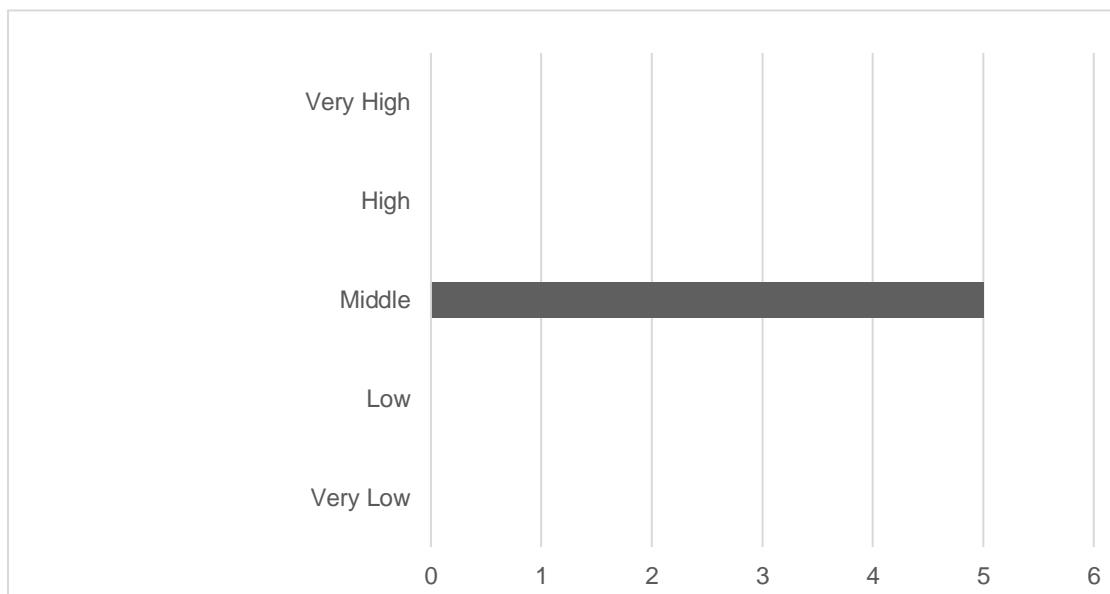


Table 6. Question #6: “Currently, to what degree has the challenge of ‘relationships with co-laborers’ improved?” (choose one description)

Questions #5 and #6 were combined as a series. Pastors estimated whether they could properly take care of issues that arise in their relationships with co-laborers now and then. The most scored option was “Middle,” indicating problems could be addressed, but outcomes might be lacking in satisfaction.

With the results of Questions #3 and #4, pastors agreed the relationship issue was common in their ministries. At the same time, however, their capability to solve the problem might only be scored as fair.

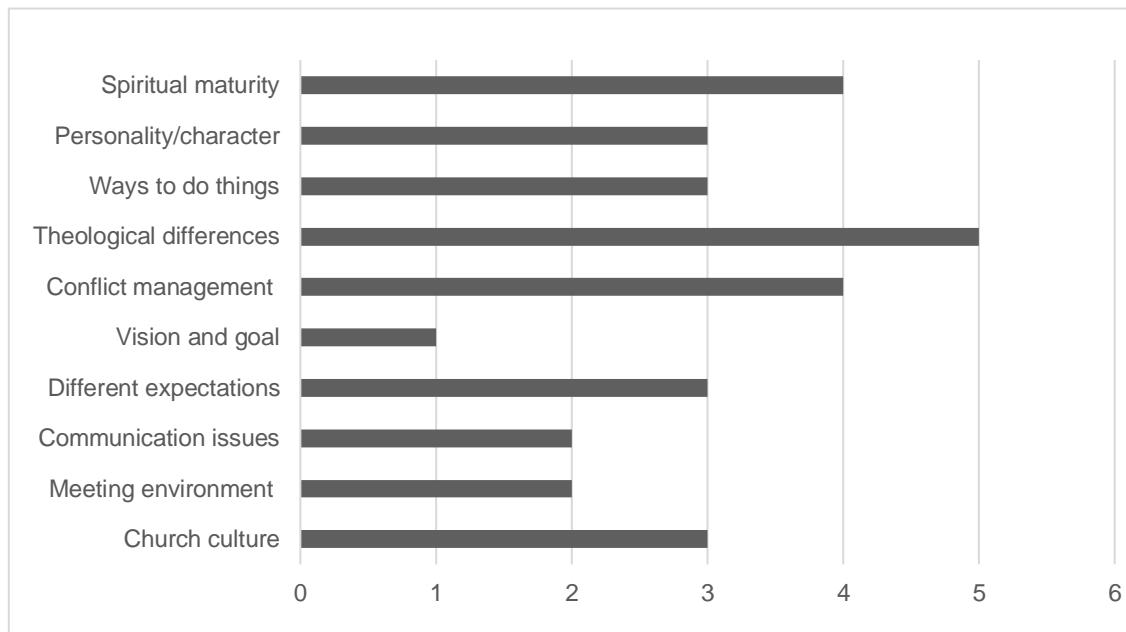


Table 7a. Question #7: “What do you think are the most influential factors concerning ‘relationships with co-laborers’?”

Concerning factors affecting the pastors’ relationships with co-laborers, the score of each option was calculated by taking the total number of “4” and “5” responses. For example, on “spiritual maturity,” two respondents circled “4” and two others circled “5”. Therefore, the total score on this option was four (two “4s” and two “5s”). Because the options were many, this way of counting enhances the most chosen options so as to differentiate each factor clearly.

From this perspective, “theological differences” scored the highest (5 scores). In second place were “spiritual maturity” (4 scores) and “conflict management” (4 scores). To the author, it was surprising to see how theology mattered in regard to relationships among leaders. In fact, pastors did mention their theological differences with co-laborers. For example, issues such as prayer meetings, re-marriage, criteria for baptism or

Communion, inclusion of the Chinese Dragon Dance in the church's Chinese Festival celebration, etc., all indeed are theological at some level.

Further, pastors believed spiritual issues were related to conflict. The equal score implies the interaction between the two factors. In one interview some respondents commented decisively that relationship issues were ultimately spiritual ones.

Now, as an alternative to understanding the response, if the scores were calculated by adding together the “2” and “3” responses, the new result is still meaningful. By this way of counting, the highest result becomes “vision and goal” (see Table 7b below). The second was “communication issues.” From this perspective, one can take church vision and goal and communication problems as other important factors affecting relationships. That is to say, if the leaders come up with the same vision and goal, the relationship may improve. In the same way, if the leaders improve their communication, they may enjoy a more friendly relationship.

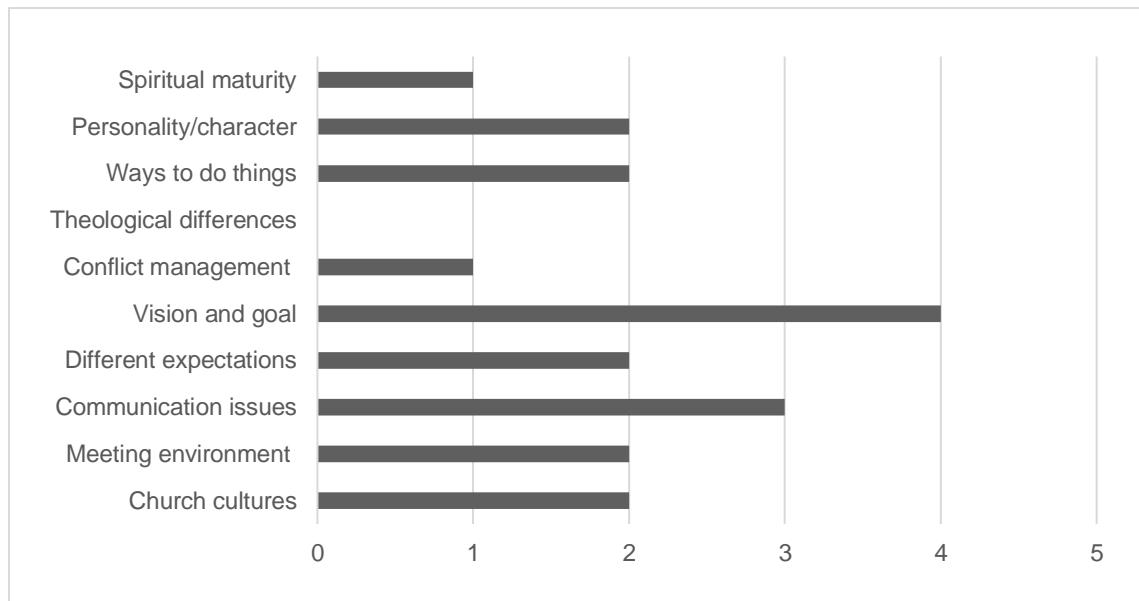


Table 7b. Alternative interpretation of answers to Question #7: “What do you think are the most influential factors concerning ‘relationships with co-laborers’?”

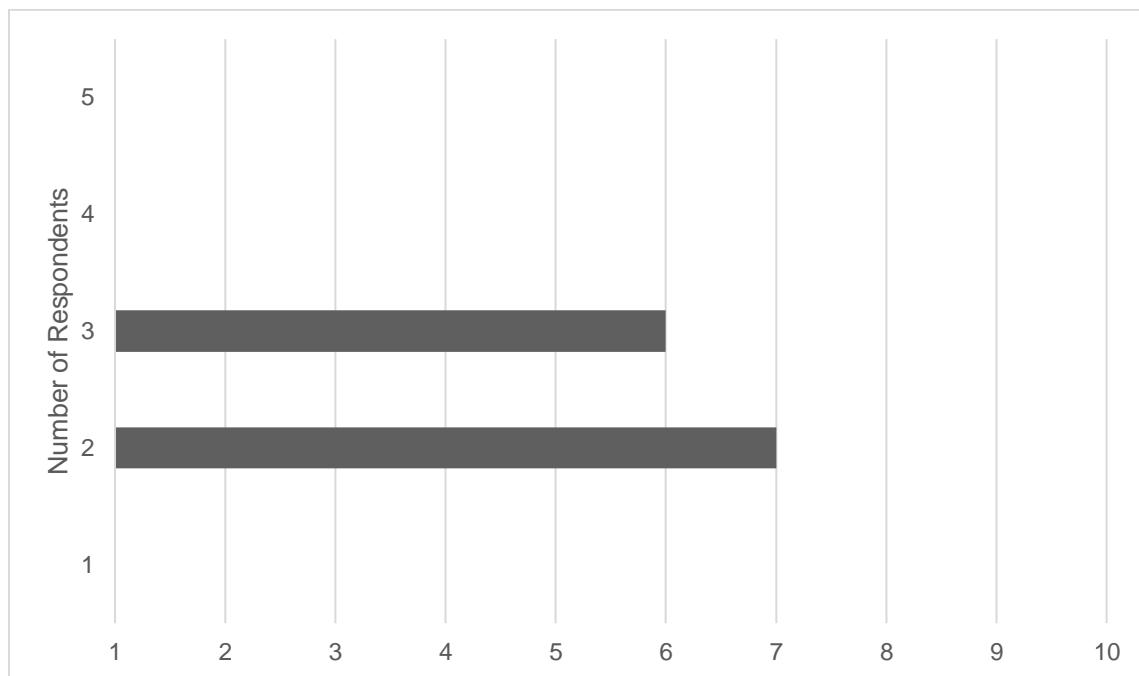


Table 8. Question #8: “In ‘relationships with co-laborers’, on a scale of one to ten, how is your ability to manage conflict?”

Question #8 resulted in the highest number of responses in the middle of the one to ten scale: two respondents circled number “6”, three others, number “7”. Although admitting their relationships with co-laborers could be a long-term problem, pastors, however, had some degree of confidence in their ability to manage conflict. The outcome might not always be satisfying, but they do address the issues without avoidance.

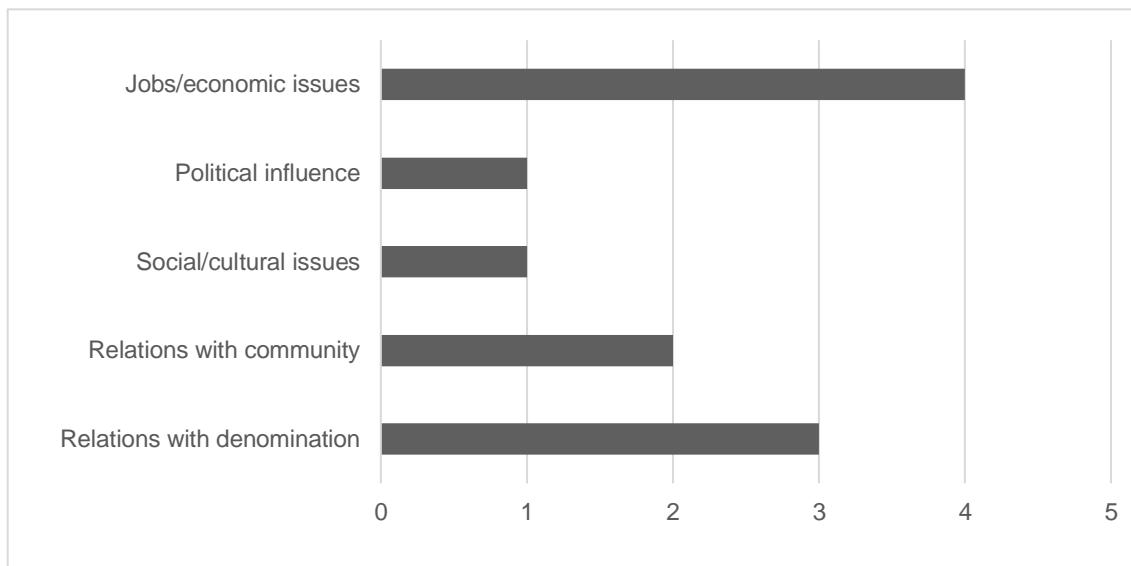


Table 9. Question #9: “What do you think are the most influential factors outside the church affecting the ministry?”

Concerning factors outside the church affecting the ministry, the score of each option in the table above is the sum of the number of “4” and “5” responses. Apparently, the highest score was “jobs/economic issues.” As was the presumption of this thesis-project, job issues greatly impact church ministry in small Chinese churches in New England. As mentioned in the previous chapters, the respondents regarded economic influence as determinative. The result is consistent with pastors’ common concern throughout the interviews of job cuts in their communities.

As for the second highest score, “relations with denomination,” it could refer to the participants’ personal preference—three of the respondents are with the Christian & Missionary Alliance.<sup>2</sup> Owing to their close relationship to the denomination, the three pastors and their churches are directly influenced by denominational decisions, especially

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2. The Alliance, accessed November 15, 2018, <https://www.cmalliance.org>.

regarding the ordination of pastors. Accordingly, one of the pastors once indicated that in his case, the denomination had the right to decide whether to approve his ordination regardless of the church's opinion. If so, no wonder all three pastors with that denomination agreed with the high level of influence from the denomination. On the contrary, the other two pastors with Baptist denominations (ABCUSA and CBAmerica), responded with the lowest score (1 score) on their questionnaires.

Therefore, for small Chinese churches, denominational relations may play a role especially in pastoral ministry, but only if the churches are associated with denominations instituting ordination or making other essential decisions on behalf of the local church. On the other hand, if the church has a loose relationship with a denomination, or has no denominational affiliation, the denominational influence is expected to be limited.

Regarding political and social factors, the score was equally low. But in the interviews pastors did consider political interference from the Chinese government, for example, practically affects Chinese ministry here in the United States. To the author, pastors' different responses to the same question might be attributed to a technical issue. In the questionnaire, the author did not specify which politics, namely Chinese or American, could have an influence on the church. If the poll had clearly specified, the result would possibly be different.

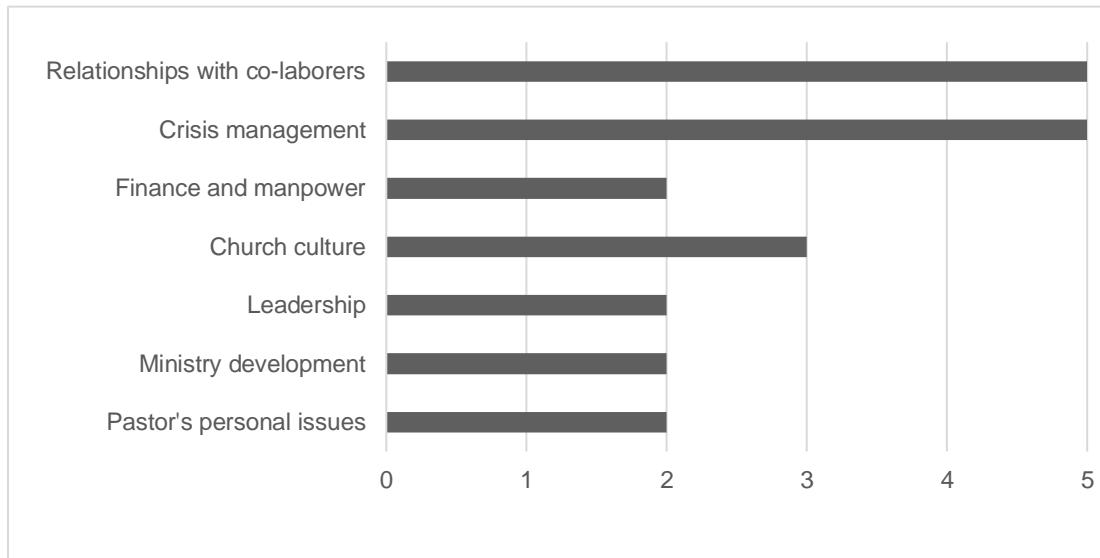


Table 10. Question #10: “What do you think are the most influential factors inside the church affecting the ministry?”

Concerning factors inside the church affecting the ministry, the score of each item is again the sum of the “4” and “5” responses. Apparently, the leading scores belonged to “relationships with co-laborers” and “crisis management.” Again, the relationship issue comes dominantly into view. At the same time, the pastors take great effort in dealing with crises, whether they originate from relationships or other issues.

Intriguingly, the finance and manpower issues did not garner higher scores. The basic presumption of the thesis, as mentioned, was that the church’s existence was at stake due to serious restrictions of financial and human resources caused by outside economic factors. Under that hypothesis, the highest scored option here should have been “finance and manpower,” consistent with the economic factors outside the church. But, here again, the participants’ responses did not meet the expectation. Do the lower scores here imply a contradiction with the results of Question #9, that the jobs issue was one of the most influential factors affecting the ministry?

To answer this question, first of all, it seems that pastors consider the inside factors of “relationships with co-laborers” and “crisis management” affect the ministry more directly, although in the long run the outside factors (e.g., “economic”) have a greater influence. In the case of day-to-day operations, the pastors might think that relationships with co-laborers are apparently more relevant than a gradually evolving loss of financial security and availability of manpower. Secondly, in view of the psychological impact, pastors can immediately feel stronger pressure from confronting relationship issues or individual crises than any outside factor. The outside social issues, such as economic issues, having already been there for a while, might not instantly generate the same magnitude of emotional influence or pressure as the relationship between church co-laborers.

Thirdly, it is possible that while outside pressure mounts, inside conflicts intensify correspondingly. When financial and human resources are reduced, pressure in the ministry increases, which eventually develops more tension among co-laborers. Conclusively, according to the above analysis, the seemingly paradoxical results of Questions #9 and #10 might herein find an acceptable resolution.

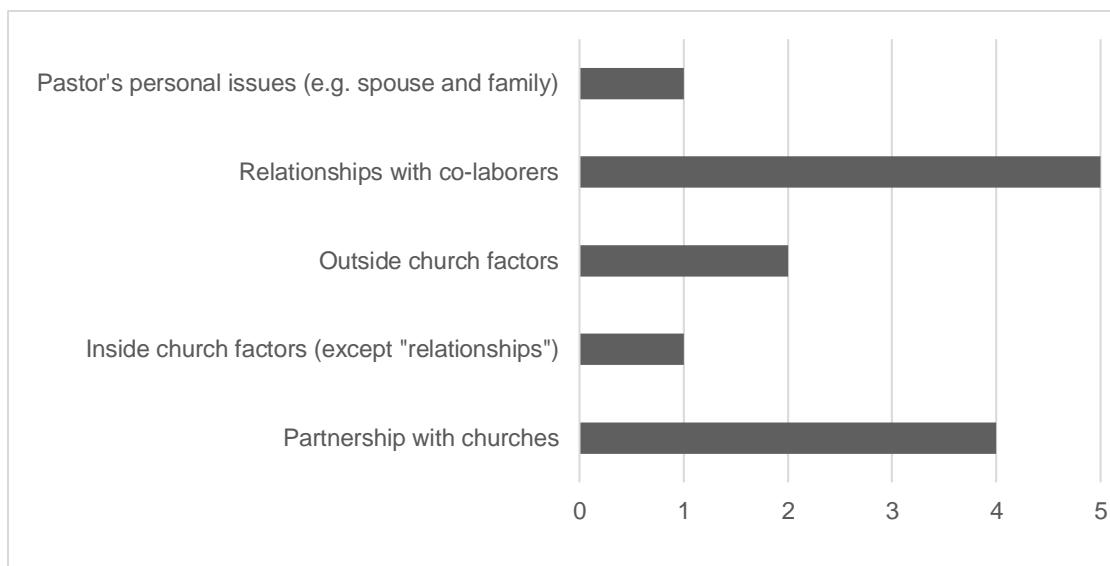


Table 11. Question #11: “Currently, what concerns you most in the ministry?”

“Relationships with co-laborers” remained the highest score for Question #11. It goes without saying this problematic issue will stay with the pastoral ministry whether or not the church is struggling with survival. What is impressive here is the second highest score, “partnership with churches.” This indicates the pastors’ hope and need to connect with fellow pastors and churches. One of the purposes of this thesis-project, as stated, was to gather together pastors in the area so that they might know one another and seek fellowship and partnership. From this point of view, the project successfully created an opportunity for such a connection.

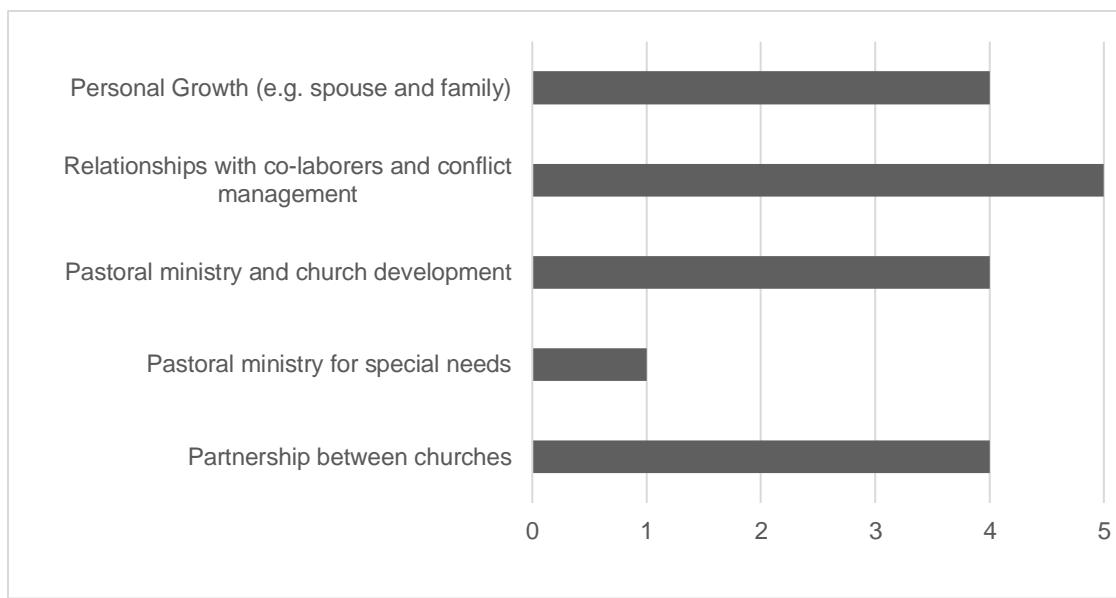


Table 12. Question #12: “What topics would you like to cover in the next pastoral meeting/interview?”

The results of Question #12 indicate respondents’ hope to work on relationships with co-laborers and conflict management in future meetings. The second highest scoring item is the pastors’ concern regarding their own personal growth, including the growth of their spouse and family. Although during the interviews the respondents rarely touched on family issues, they did not ignore the well-being of their families. Occasionally some pastors mentioned mental or physical issues of their wives. During the period of the interviews, a pastor’s wife had become pregnant and later gave birth. The pastor reported that in the midst of severe confrontation with leaders, the wife’s pregnancy intensified pressure because of his own job uncertainty and the couple’s finance burdens. Accordingly, family issues played a significant role in the pastor’s personal life and pastoral ministry.

At the same time, pastors hope to discuss pastoral ministry and church development. For small Chinese churches, development can parallel relationship issues.

Since the scores were close, the two factors might be related. Finally, the pastors were also interested in building partnership with fellow churches. Their response suggests the necessity of continuing this partnership.

## Conclusion

This thesis-project began with an assumption that, owing to current social factors, small Chinese churches in New England face a challenge for survival. First of all, economic turmoil causes Chinese people to move out of states such as Connecticut. Chinese immigrants' displacement impacts finances and manpower in the church because core members and families leave for other job opportunities. Secondly, some characteristics of the immigrant church, such as high mobility, accelerate the loss of church attendees. Further, Chinese culture also plays a role in the transition. The usage of more and more social media, such as WeChat, gradually replaces the role the church plays as a community center. The church's traditional functions in the immigrant community may therefore lose their advantage of outreach and mission. These outer social changes have contributed to the difficulty of the church's existence and development.

Besides those challenges from the outside, the church needs to deal with inner issues, such as theological obstacles. Because of the harsh environment of immigrants, it takes more effort for Chinese Christians to maintain an acceptable life standard than it does for them to pursue spiritual growth. Secularism also threatens the church's spiritual health at the juncture of survival. Chinese Christians are tempted to de-centralize God in an endeavor to overcome the status quo, replacing it with a conviction for self-made

success. Likewise, Chinese churches are also lured into a self-rescue mindset, detaching from Biblical doctrines and practices. Another issue inside the church is relationship. Although small churches rely on a robust relationship, in fact many conflicts are relational rather than ministerial. Therein, the leaders' relationships often affect church ministry and unity. One purpose of this study was to find out what causes relational struggles among leaders, including the tension between pastor and lay leaders.

In conclusion, intriguingly, the research indicates that, regarding the church's existence and continuity, it is the relationships between co-laborers that predominantly challenges Chinese pastors and churches. Relational conflicts between leaders are not only one of the main characteristics of the small Chinese church, but *the* one that drives pastoral and church ministry. In almost every category the highest scores from the interviewees belong to relational issues. Presumptively relationships in small churches may be one of the core values, but it affects more than many realize. Relationship issues, especially involving the leadership, is one of the foremost concerns, worries, and troubles in pastoral ministry at this juncture. The results suggest that for the church to survive, the relationship between co-laborers needs to survive in the first place.

Although socio-economic influence, such as job loss or displacement, is crucial, it is only one of the secondary factors, additionally deteriorating relationships with co-laborers at the critical moment of survival. While losing members and leaders can be out of the control of the leadership, the crisis itself may trigger more confrontation among remaining leaders and the congregation, replacing a loving fellowship or a sensible mutual understanding. Nevertheless, a stronger relationship between co-laborers would be a better response to the economic crisis, so that the leaders and congregation may

undergo the sufferings together in a supportive way. Further, other social or cultural impacts, such as the use of social media, only reflect one aspect of the relationship. For example, more than one of the participants expressed their anxiety in managing social media such as WeChat. Christians nowadays even publicly dispute with one another about social media. But unrestrained or even malicious online conversations often appear when the relationship has already become tense in person. Laypeople may disagree with each other in a face-to-face meeting; afterwards they escalate the tension by posting their arguments on social media to conjure support. In a sense, however, social media becomes an arena to test the relationship of co-laborers, often resulting in challenging church unity. Consequently, the above low score of cultural impact proves that this sort of outside influence could be merely a side effect of relational conflicts from within.

The research also reveals that issues affecting relationships are communication, vision/goal differences, conflict, spiritual maturity, and, most of all, theological differences. In a feedback meeting, all participants agreed with the reality that theological issues put the most strain on their relationships with fellow leaders and members. Again, some cultural issues, such as whether to hold the Dragon Dance in the Chinese Festival at church, is in fact covered by the scope of theological debate. More relevant issues concerning church theology are about the denomination's stance. Two of the pastors with C&MA churches indicated that primary interference from the denomination is not about pastoral assignment or ordination, but with regard to denominational theology, which might create a conflict when fellow leaders refuse to recognize some of the core doctrines. In churches, not all of the leaders accept denominational tradition and theological perspectives. Besides denominations, there are other ongoing theological

issues today in the small Chinese church. Differences such as the Charismatic Movement and beliefs, baptism traditions, hermeneutic theology, etc., may still trouble the church and create division, while the leadership has an obligation to look for ministerial breakthroughs. Participants reaffirm that co-laborers may compromise in their disagreements on cultural backgrounds or personality, but not in their distinct theological understandings. And those non-negotiable stances or beliefs do damage the relationship. Accordingly, leaders need to discern nuances of theology underneath relational conflicts. For this reason, for the church to survive, the leadership should at the very least find common ground on basic church theology. Meanwhile, not surprisingly, the survey results suggest there is a close correlation between leaders' relationships and church development that one can rationally assume the relationship of leaders *is* in fact a major part of church survival, only if the leaders reach consensus on church theology as their priority.

Finally, this research concludes Chinese pastors feel strongly about building up friendship with fellow ministers. The results also imply that a possible tactic of survival for the small Chinese church could take shape in church partnership, just as pastors started to know each other during this research project. Certainly, the pastors expect pastoral/church partnership together, small churches may therefore have a better chance to survive the status quo, so as to prepare for breakthroughs and development collectively. Yet, not only for the sake of church survival and development but for pastoral fellowship, small churches and pastors in New England will rely on the partnership both now and in the future. Decisively, in the time of the modern remnant, small Chinese churches and pastors should review their relationship with the Lord, with

fellow co-laborers and members, and with church partners in the area. To the church, the crisis of survival serves as a test and a testimony for faithful relationship with the Lord. To pastors and leaders, their mutual trust and friendship may reflect that spiritual relationship in an endurable partnership within church leadership and with other churches and leaders. The remnant is neither alone nor diminishing, for they have supportive friends on earth and the trustworthy Friend above—the Sovereign Lord does promise them, “A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out” (Isaiah 42:3).

## APPENDIX A

### INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT

Project Title: Surviving the Small Church: A Survey of Chinese Immigrant Churches and Pastors in New England

Principal Investigator: Chienchen (Joshua) Huang, Doctor of Ministry

#### PURPOSE

This is a research study. The purpose of this research study is to study a pastoral theology of small membership Chinese immigrant churches in the New England area. The research will be used to fulfill the requirement of the Doctor of Ministry program in GCTS only. The purpose of this consent form is to give you the information you will need to help you decide whether to be in the study or not. You may ask any questions about the research, what you will be asked to do, the possible risks and benefits, your rights as a volunteer, and anything else about the research or this form that is not clear.

We are inviting you to participate in this research study because you serve in one of the prestige Chinese churches in Connecticut areas. In regard of your spiritual leading position as pastor you are invited to join the study to ponder the current issues in the pastoral ministry of your church.

#### PROCEDURES

If you agree to participate, your involvement will last for approximate eight to twelve months/times in this research since the pastoral monthly meeting began in December 2016.

The following procedures are involved in this study. During the meetings, all of the participants will join an interview format of pastoral forum to discuss the concerned topics for at least one hour. The interview will be held once a month. You may offer your observation and opinion on each topic/question, or you may refuse to answer if things are confidential or private to either your church or to yourself.

#### RISKS

The possible risks associated with participating in this research project are as follows. There are no foreseeable risks to participating.

#### BENEFITS

The potential personal benefits that may occur as a result of your participation in this study are no personal benefits for participating, though, but the researcher anticipates that, in the future, the Chinese churches may benefit from this study by pastoral conversations, prayers for the churches and sharing the resources.

#### COMPENSATION

You will not be compensated for participating in this research project.

## **CONFIDENTIALITY**

Records of participation in this research project will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by law. The researcher will use code name for each participant in the record stored in the personal recorder/computer. Only the researcher can access the record. You will be represented as code name in the researcher's thesis project. In the event of any report or publication from this study, your identity will not be disclosed. Results will be reported in a summarized manner in such a way that you cannot be identified.

## **VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION**

Taking part in this research study is voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. If you agree to participate in this study, you may stop participating at any time. If you decide not to take part, or if you stop participating at any time, your decision will not result in any penalty or loss of benefits to which you may otherwise be entitled. If you decide not to participate, your part of the disclosure in the interview-forum will be deleted from the researcher's computer/recorder.

## **QUESTIONS**

Questions are encouraged. If you have any questions about this research project, please contact: Josh Huang, (203)2729513, c.josh.h@gmail.com. If you have questions about your rights as a participant, please contact the Co-Chair of the Institutional Review Board, David A. Currie, at: dcur-rie@gordonconwell.edu; 978-646-4176

Your signature indicates that this research study has been explained to you, that your questions have been answered, and that you agree to take part in this study. You will receive a copy of this form.

Participant's Name (printed): \_\_\_\_\_

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(Signature of Participant)

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(Date)

## **RESEARCHER STATEMENT**

I have discussed the above points with the participant. It is my opinion that the participant understands the risks, benefits, and procedures involved with participation in this research study.

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(Signature of Researcher)

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(Date)

## APPENDIX B

### A SURVEY FOR PASTORAL MEETING/INTERVIEWS FOR PASTORS IN CONNECTICUT

Question #1: “What benefited you most in the pastoral meetings/interviews?” (choose one to three options)

- Free sharing
- Topical sharing
- Knowing pastors
- Praying together
- Building partnerships
- Lunch time

Question #2: “Among the topics covered in the pastoral meetings/interviews, which benefited you most?” (choose one or two options)

- Relationships with co-laborers
- Pastoral works
- Church development/crisis management
- Current social/cultural issues
- Recommendation of ministries

Question #3: “In the past three years, what magnitude was the challenge of ‘relationships with co-laborers’?” (choose one description)

- Very great
- Great
- Medium
- Small

Question #4: “Currently, what magnitude is the challenge of ‘relationships with co-laborers’?”

(choose one description)

- Very great
- Great
- Medium
- Small

Question #5: “In the past three years, to what degree has the challenge of ‘relationships with co-laborers’ improved?” (choose one description)

- Very high
- High
- Middle
- Low
- Very low

Question #6: “Currently, to what degree has the challenge of ‘relationships with co-laboreres’ improved?” (choose one description)

- Very high
- High
- Middle
- Low
- Very low

Question #7: “What do you think are the most influential factors concerning ‘relationships with co-laborers’?” (circle one number on the one to five scale; the higher number, the more influence)

Spiritual maturity

1 2 3 4 5

Personality/character

1 2 3 4 5

Ways to do things

1 2 3 4 5

Theological differences

1 2 3 4 5

Conflict management

1 2 3 4 5

Vision and goal

1 2 3 4 5

Different expectations

1 2 3 4 5

Communication issues

1 2 3 4 5

Meeting environment

1 2 3 4 5

Church culture

1 2 3 4 5

Question #8: “In ‘relationships with co-laborers’, on a scale of one to ten, how is your ability to manage conflict?” (circle one number on a one to ten scale; the higher the number, the greater your ability)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Question #9: “What do you think are the most influential factors outside the church affecting the ministry?” (circle one number on the one to five scale; the higher number, the more influence)

Jobs/economic issues

1 2 3 4 5

Political influence

1 2 3 4 5

Social/cultural issues

1 2 3 4 5

Relations with community

1 2 3 4 5

Relations with denomination

1 2 3 4 5

Question #10: “What do you think are the most influential factors inside the church affecting the ministry?” (circle one number on the one to five scale; the higher number, the more influence)

Relationships with co-laborers

1 2 3 4 5

Crisis management

1 2 3 4 5

Finance and manpower

1 2 3 4 5

Church culture

1 2 3 4 5

Leadership

1 2 3 4 5

Ministry development

1 2 3 4 5

Pastor's personal issues

1 2 3 4 5

Question #11: "Currently, what concerns you most in the ministry?" (choose a maximum of three options)

- Pastor's personal issues (e.g. spouse and family)
- Relationships with co-laborers
- Outside church factors
- Inside church factors (except "relationships")
- Partnership with churches

Question #12: "What topics would you like to cover in the next pastoral meeting/interview?" (unlimited options)

- Personal growth (e.g. spouse and family)
- Relationships with co-laborers and conflict management
- Pastoral ministry and church development
- Pastoral ministry for special needs
- Partnership between churches

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